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internet magazine

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- Avoid being ripped off

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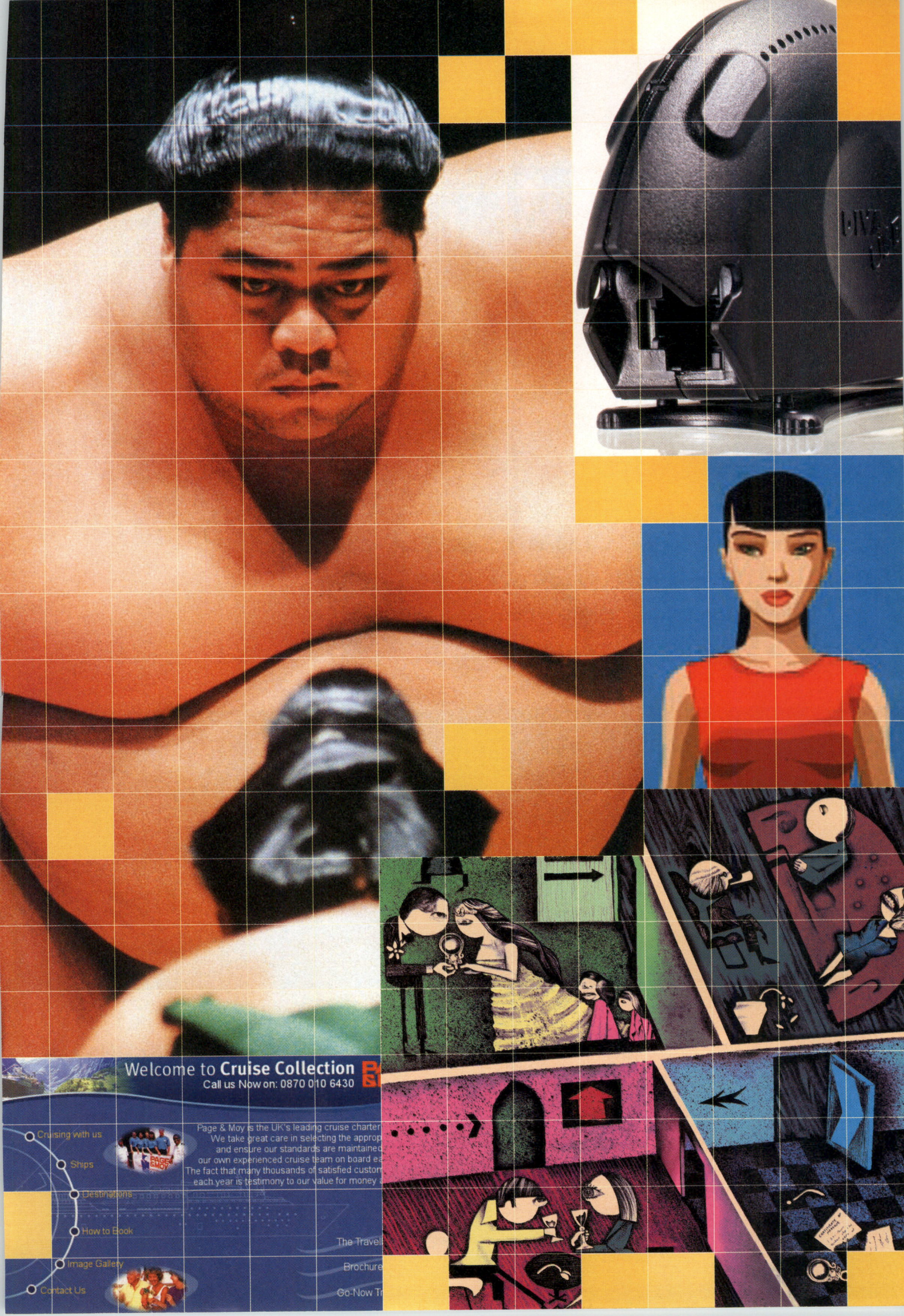
In this month's issue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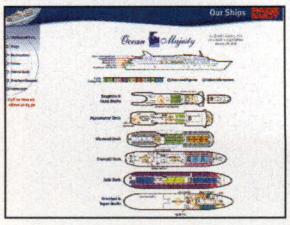

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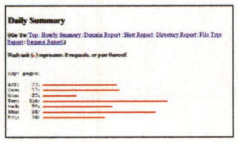

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Editor'swelcome

It's over to you

Welcome to the February issue of *Internet Magazine*. We're always working to keep you up to date with the latest Internet happenings, and entertained with the best the Web has to offer.

But we also like to think we set the Internet agenda now and again. This month sees the consultation phase of our Internet Bill of Rights. We want ISPs to be accountable to their customers – that's you. At the moment, they can get away with just about anything.

To find out what a range of experts think of our Bill, turn to page 62. And then you can get involved yourself. The next stage is to take your responses to the ISPs, so we want your comments, your experiences with ISPs and, hopefully, your support.

Last month we were campaigning for unmetered calls. This month, we've got them. But could somebody please explain to me why BT has priced the calls at £34.99 a month? We might use the Net a lot, but this is ridiculous. This won't bring the Internet to the masses or boost UK e-commerce.

Right, now I've got that out of my system, onto more pleasant matters – affairs of the heart. Make sure you've got a hot date in time for Valentine's Day with our guide to a great online love life on page 52. And find the best home for your real passion – your Web site – on page 46.

Tanya Kreisky
Assistant Editor
tanyak@internet.emap.com

Martyn Moore is on secondment, working on an internal Emap project. Tanya Kreisky has full editorial responsibility for *Internet Magazine*.

internet magazine is committed to bringing you the best in Net software every month...

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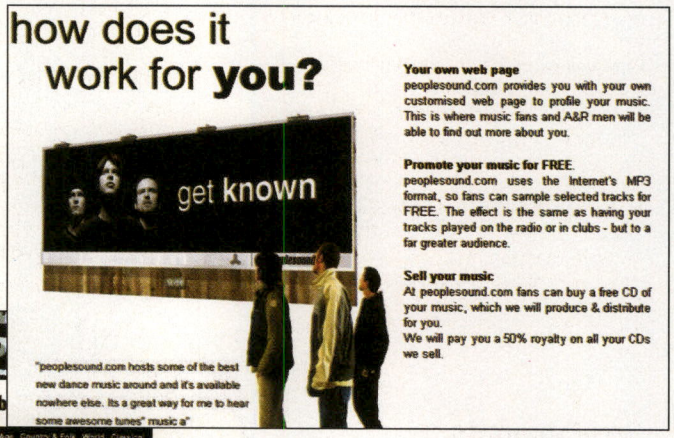

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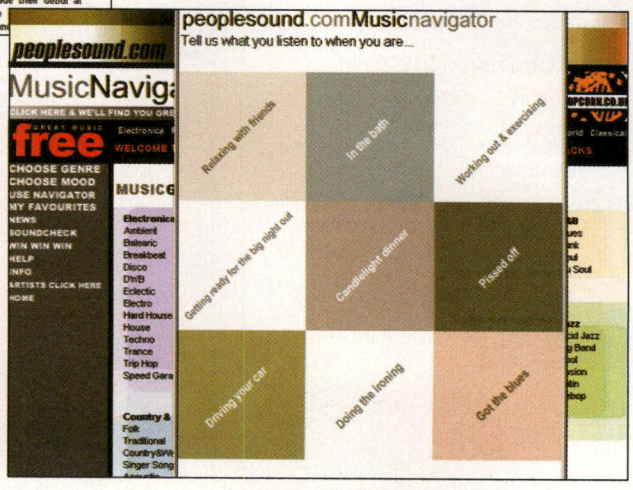

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Internet Magazine and EMAP Active cannot be held responsible for any problems arising from their use, or for the failure of any programs to run correctly.

You'll find most of the software on this CD is shareware. Shareware developers put in a lot of work for little return and you should register software you continue to use after the evaluation period. Charges for shareware are usually very modest and registration entitles you to customer support and free or cheap upgrades.

Using your CD

The CD's interface is written in HTML, which means you can open it in any browser. Just open your browser, select File Open, access your CD drive and load the file index.htm.

If you don't have a browser, fear not. We've thoughtfully included the latest versions of Netscape Communicator and Internet Explorer on the CD for Windows 9.x/NT4 and the Mac. You'll find them in the Browser section on your CD.

your free cover CD

This month's must-have software

Site building

Elated Web Kits Exclusive Free Web site templates that you can customise (Win)
1st Page 2000 HTML/script authoring tool (W9x/NT)
GoLive Trial version Slick Web site development tool (W9x/NT/Mac)
SmartSite Shareware HTML editor (W9x)
Arachnophilia Win95 to HTML convertor (W9x/NT)
Cool Page Shareware Web page design tool (W9x/NT)
CoffeeCup HTML Editor Popular HTML editor (W9x/NT)
Style Master Control your style sheets (W9x/NT)
WebSpeed Optimizer Trial version See your site as others see it (W9x/NT)
Applet Button Factory Create clever buttons (W9x/NT4)
Applet Navigation Factory Better site navigation (W9x/NT)
Pagespinner Full-featured text editor (Mac)
Wallaby Flexible Web editor (Mac)
MacTidy Freeware Fix your HTML mistakes (Mac)
Big Brother Keep an eye on your Web links (Mac)
HTML Optimizer Remove unnecessary characters and tags (Mac)
Freeway 30-day trial Powerful Web site builder (Mac)
BBEdit Demo version Classic Mac HTML editor (Mac)
HexWeb Typograph Demo version Create HTML documents using different fonts and styles (Mac)
OptimaHTML Reduces the size of Web pages (Mac)
Injection Pro 15-day demo Get higher site rankings (Mac)
GoClick Convert your documents to Web pages (Mac)

Great graphics

Fireworks 3 New version Web graphics suite (W9x/NT)
ULead WebRazor Pro Trial version Web tools (W9x)
Amorphium Demo version Helps you build 3D objects (W9x)
Image Optimizer Trial version Shrink graphics (W9x/NT)
IrfanView Image file viewer (W9x/NT)
A Smaller GIF Shrink your animated GIFs (Mac)
Graphic Converter Does exactly what it says on the box (Mac)
ProJPEG Prepare your pics for the Web (Mac)

For your toolkit

Web Trends Enterprise Suite Trial version eBusiness Management solution (NT)
Analog Analyse Web server logfiles (W9x/NT/Mac)
FastStats Logfile analyser (W9x/NT)
NeoTrace 30-day trial Get info on failed connections (W9x/NT)
Visual Route Tracks Web hosts (W9x)
CuteFTP File transfer application (W9x/NT4)
CoffeeCup DirectFTP FTP client (W9x/NT4)
DirectX Multimedia extension for Windows (W95)
Adobe Acrobat Reader Read PDF files (W9x/NT4/Mac)
TopDog Evaluation version Site ranking app (W9x/NT)
GetRight Recover your downloaded file errors (W3.x/W9x/NT/Mac)
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WinZip Evaluation version Compression software (W3.x/W9x/NT4)
Vbrun Visual Basic runtime libraries for Windows (W95)
Stuffit Expander Top archive unpacker tool (Mac)
Vremya Freeware Sets your clock from the Net (Mac)
NetChronometer Synchronises your clock (Mac)
SiteRanger Copy your site onto your local drive (Mac)
Anarchie Pro New version Popular FTP tool (Mac)
VSE Be Found Submits sites to search engines (Mac)
Download Deputy 30-day trial Set up batch downloads (Mac)
OT/PPP Strip Lets you switch connections using your Control Strip (Mac)
Mac OS Runtime for Java Run Java applications and applets (Mac)
Fetch Well-known file retriever. Good dog! (Mac)

Just browsing

Amaya Testing browser for standards (Win 9x/NT)
Lynx Text-only browser (W9x/NT/DOS)
NeoPlanet Rebadged version of Explorer (Win 9x)
WebWasher Get rid of banner ads and pop-up windows (W9x/NT)

Netscape Communicator 4.7 New version (W9x/Mac)
Linkman Professional Bookmarks manager (W9x/NT)
Opera Fast and simple browser (W3x/W9x/NT)
Internet Explorer 5 New version (W9x/NT4)
Pagesucker Download Web page hierarchies (Mac)
MacHeadlines Customisable news ticker (Mac)
Web Devil Download pages for offline browsing (Mac)
Internet Explorer 4.5 (Mac)

Enhanced email

Stationery Paper Maker Create your own email backgrounds (W9x)
Mail Essentials for Exchange/SMTP Email and management gateway application (NT4)
Spam Buster Gives you spammer addresses to block (W9x/NT)
Pegasus Mail New version Free email client (W3.x/W9x)
SpamEater Pro New version Fight spam (W9x/NT4)
WebMail Alert 2000 Watches your system for new mail (W9x)
Spam Solution Encrypts your email addresses (Win)
Eudora Pro Update for version 4 (Mac)
E-mail Cleaner Cleans up email and newsgroup texts (Mac)
Mail Convert Convert your Web site form submissions into a usable text file format (Mac)
LetterRip Pro 30-day trial Set up mailing lists (Mac)
Pegasus Mail New version Free email client (W3.x/Mac)
Email Merge Create customised email (Mac)

Multimedia

Koan MP3 plug-in for the Web (W9x/NT)
Sonique Windows audio player (W9x/NT)
ACID Music Streaming audio files creator (W9x/NT)
RealJukeBox Play and record music (W9x/NT4)
RealPlayer G2 Media player (W9x/NT/Mac)
RealPlayer 5 Update of RealPlayer G2 (W3.x)
Awave Reads audio file formats (W9x/NT)
WinAmp MPEG audio player (W9x/NT)
Audio Catalyst Trial version CD ripper and encoder (W9x)
Flash 4 30-day trial Create interactive multimedia content (W9x/NT4/Mac)
Shockwave 7 Play Director and Flash media (W3.x/W9x/NT4/Mac)
Apple QuickTime Multimedia software and plug-in (W3.xW9x/NT4/Mac)
e-Picture 30-day trial Create animated Web graphics (Mac)
GIFmation GIF animation application (Mac)
Animation Maker Web animation software (Mac)
MacTuner 20-day trial Find broadcasts on the Internet (Mac)
Macast 15-day trial MP3 and audio CD player (Mac)
CoolCam Shareware Easy to use Web cam application (Mac)

Extra bits

Living Screen Demo version Screensaver tool for Flash 4 (W9x/NT)
Screen Loupe Magnification tool (W9x/NT)
GameSpy Shareware Find and join online games (W9x/NT)
Online Call Manager Phone management utility (W9x)
Instant Rendezvous beta Communicate with other visitors to a site (W9x/NT)
ICQ beta Instant messaging program (W9x/NT/Mac)
Hotline Connect Server Connect with people online (Mac)
Hotline Client Chat to others online and transfer files between your computers (Mac)
Web Confidential Security program (Mac)

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Price excludes naming authority fees

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- Full graphical site statistics

Price excludes naming authority fees

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Other Services

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Database facilities	from £200 pa
Filemaker Pro database hosting	from £200 pa

Naming Authority Fees

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Global domains (.com, .org, .net)	£45
Ireland domain (.ie)	£95

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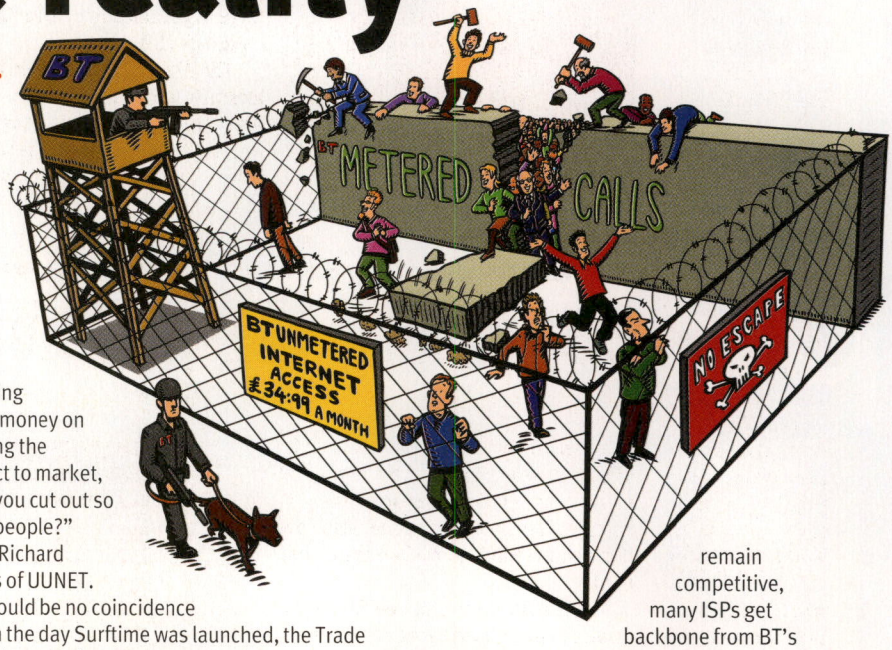
Unmetered Net calls become a reality

But the cost is double what they pay in the US.



British Telecom has bowed to public and Government pressure to introduce unmetered Net calls. But the service isn't cheap, costing £34.99 a month for unlimited access, a price unlikely to dent BT's profits of around £105 a second.

There are five tiers in the BT Surftime scheme, but only the £34.99 option offers full, 24-hour unmetered Net access. This is almost double the price of the same service in the US, and none of the new BT packages includes voice calls.

The move has received a cautious welcome. "It's a breakthrough – we have come a long way," Erol Ziya of the Campaign for Unmetered Calls told us. "But it's early days."

"There is no doubt in our minds that prices for consumers have to come down further in order not to create a 'digital divide' in society,"said Andreas Schmidt, CEO of AOL Europe.

The daytime Surftime option (£26.99) means that, to benefit, users would need to spend more than two hours a day online. The weekend option of £6.99 would be a good deal for those who spend over 12 hours online over Saturday and Sunday. The evening weekday Internet option, also charged at £6.99 a month, would benefit anyone who uses the Net for around an hour and a half each night.

While the packages offer a reasonable deal in relative terms (compared to BT's current charges), they are inflexible."What's the point of spending all the money on bringing the product to market, when you cut out so many people?" asked Richard Woods of UUNET.

It could be no coincidence that on the day Surftime was launched, the Trade and Industry Select Committee was due to meet with Oftel to discuss BT's near-monopoly in the UK telco industry.

While deflecting criticism for its Internet access charges, BT is keen to ensure that local voice call charges remain as expensive as ever. So, subject to approval from Oftel, the charging system will use an 0844 number, which will be for Net access only, not unmetered local voice calls.

Most seriously, it looks like users will have to sign up to an ISP that uses BT as its backbone. To remain competitive, many ISPs get backbone from BT's rivals such as Energis, Cable & Wireless and Telinco.

Most ISPs believe that real price cuts will only made with the unbundling of the local loop. Only then will we see control move from BT, allowing new companies to introduce innovative and competitive pricing structures. The bad news is that we'll all have to wait until 2001 for that.

www.bt.com
www.oftel.org.uk
www.unmetered.org.uk

:-) Easy as pizza pie

Over the years, the convenience of take-away pizza has saved more than a few hours of domestic strife — there are no arguments over who cooks or washes up. Now, thanks to the newly revamped Domino's Pizza site, the convenience has been taken one step further. The company, which is best known for its "fresh, not frozen" dough, is now taking orders online. So far, Web designers at AKQA have placed the most orders.
www.dominos.co.uk

Telewest offers unmetered access

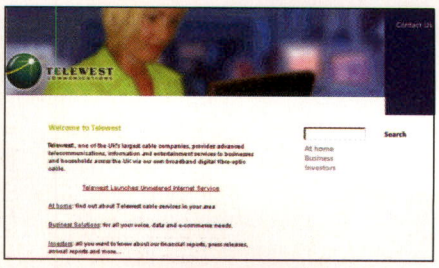
Cable company set to introduce £10 flat fee for Net lovers on Valentine's Day

Cable company, Telewest, plans to launch a flat-rate Internet access service in February 2000 as part of its Cable Internet ISP.

With the service, known as SurfUnlimited, customers who make at least £10 worth of calls over their Telewest phone line a month will be offered unlimited Internet access for an additional £10 a month. Microsoft will provide a Web portal for the service based around the MSN portal.

Users get 15 email addresses, free Web space, technical support and access to a parental control system.

The service will open officially on 14 February. The company is also planning to launch a similar product for business customers.
www.telewest.co.uk



● TeleWest's new service will have an MSN portal

OVERHEARD "The world's richest man is up for sale." A slightly misleading intro to a story about the sale of the domain billgates.co.uk

Time line

17 January
At last, the day you've been dreaming of all your life has arrived! It's the start of the fourth Open Forum on Metadata Registries, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Now, at last, you can talk about your ontology-based agent system for accessing environmental data in dispersed systems. Isn't the world a wonderful place!
www.sdct.itl.nist.gov/~ftp/l8/sc32wg2/2000/events/openforum/index.htm

25 January
Remember the Sun-Netscape Alliance? Thought not. Sadly the e-commerce application software team formed from the Netscape leftovers and Sun's developers has failed to set the Internet on fire. But now, with the release of the beta version of their iPlanet application server, they have one last chance to make it all work. Let's give them a big cheer.
www.sun.com/iplanet

February
Watch your handhelds... Palm Computing is likely to be spinning off from its parent company, networking giant 3Com, around now. With a number of key patents under its belt, a lot of happy users and former Sony Electronics president Carl Yankowski as CEO the IPO can't be far off.
www.palm.com

Government neglecting UK Web interests

Half the UK population doesn't know what the Government's up to

A recent survey shows that the British public doesn't think the Government is looking after its interests on the Net. The research, conducted by MORI for the World Internet Forum, found that more than half of those surveyed said they either did not know or care what the Government was doing to broaden access to the Net.

Derek Wyatt, MP, the forum's chairman, said no one should be surprised at the results. Nearly half (47 per cent) agreed the Web was "creating disadvantage in society." Significant differences of opinion appeared between employed and unemployed people, with the former more likely to see the Internet as an important medium.

● The World Internet Forum will be held in September

Wyatt said: "There does seem to be a huge communication job for Government to enlighten citizens."

The World Internet Forum is an international summit to discuss best practice in governments' usage and implementation of digital technologies and will be held from 3-7 September 2000 at Oxford University.
www.icp.co.uk/icp/wif

BBC Online gets a grilling

Select committee suggests running BBC site as commercial concern

A Department of Culture, Media and Sport select committee has suggested running BBC Online as a commercial venture. The cross-party panel also condemned the BBC's move into the digital market.

BBC Online is the only new BBC digital service to be praised by the committee majority. It is described as "the start of services which the BBC will increasingly be required to provide in future".

But the committee, chaired by Gerald Kaufman, MP, was worried that it will become "stultified" and recommend it is transferred out of the core BBC structure "to take advantage of the commercial opportunities created thereby".

"We are disappointed that the main report from the committee fails to engage with the vision of broadcasting in the digital age put forward by the BBC," said Colin Browne, director of corporate affairs at the BBC.

Members of BIPA, an alliance of major British Internet Publishers, said that they were concerned that, under the guise of digital technology, the BBC is entering markets that are inappropriate to its brief and is seeking public money to do so. These included the publicly funded BBC Online and as well as commercial ventures such as Beeb.com and the Freebeeb.net ISP.

● BBC Online could be forced to take adverts

● Could BBC Online go down the same commercial route as beeb.com and Freebeeb.net?

Ajay Chowdhury, MD of LineOne said: "There is a danger that particularly small startups will get crowded out of this market before it gets a chance to become profitable." Danny Meadows-Klue, head of new media at the Telegraph Group added: "The key success factors in online publishing are down to a combination of brand, great content, a lot of promotion and the right kind of operating resources. When you look at the BBC's offerings by those four criteria, you realise there very clearly is an unlevel playing field."

The BBC Online is funded by the public to the tune of £23 million a year, while similar news services from ITN and the Press Association are not. Chris Smith, Minister for Culture Media and Sport, will consider the findings.
www.parliament.uk
www.bbc.com
www.beeb.com

IN BRIEF

■ **Nominutty, the domain name company, has launched a service that will provide cheap domain name registration for charities. For a one-off administration charge of £50, registered UK charities will be able to secure .uk domains for £7.99 (fully inclusive for two years) for life. Charities looking to register a single domain will be charged only £9.99 (fully inclusive for two years).**
www.nominutty.org.uk

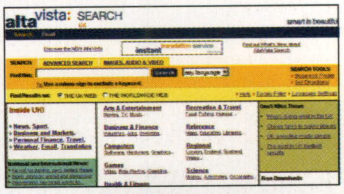
■ The Safe Internet Foundation (SIF), an initiative formed to keep the Internet reliable and safe for users, has established a UK operation. The Netherlands-based group is launching a suite of approved products and solutions to help Internet users protect themselves against unwanted information, abuse of personal data, viruses and fraud.
www.sif.nl

■ **All Government Web sites must be designed so that blind and partially sighted people can access them, thanks to a set of guidelines drawn up by the Cabinet Office.**
www.rnib.org.uk

■ ClickMusic, an alternative music portal, has revealed that it is receiving investment from some of the biggest names in music. Alan McGee of Creation Records, Julian Richer of Richer Sounds, Bob Geldof and Richard Branson are all backing the site which aims to help those of us in the UK find music Web sites faster.
www.clickmusic.co.uk

■ **Tripod UK & Ireland has released its Homepage Studio 2.0 suite. The package aims to help you create a Web site rapidly and is great for novices and people who wish to write their own HTML. Tripod gives users 12Mb of free Web space.**
www.tripod.co.uk

■ AltaVista, the US search engine, has launched a UK portal. The company says that around 2.4 million UK users already use the American version.
www.altavista.co.uk

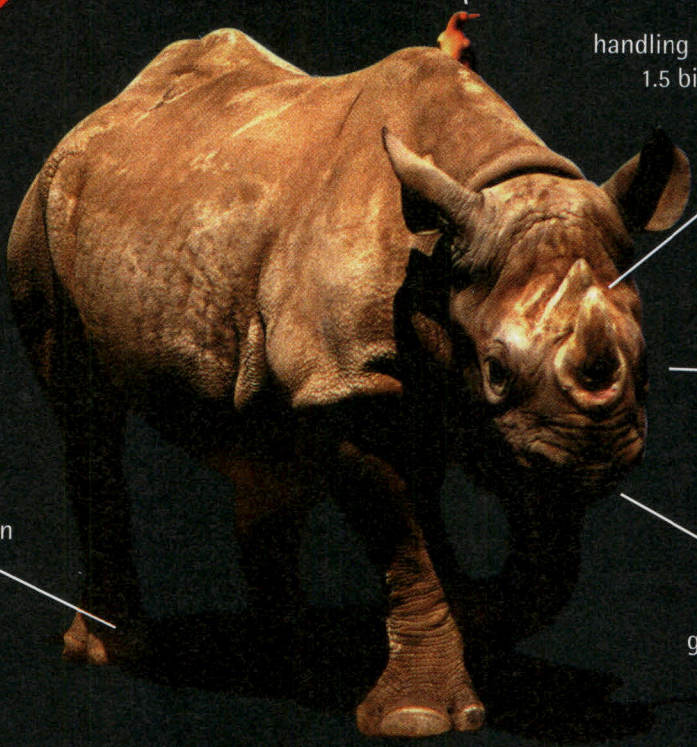


■ **Our Web site, Internet Magazine Online, has won a gold award from Webs 24/7 (www.webs247.co.uk), a group of webmasters who share a common belief that to design and build outstanding Web sites you need to look at great design examples. The commendation reads: "Recently redesigned by flg21 this is the Web designers, Web masters and Web novices haven for hints tips and facts on the Internet. Good navigation throughout this huge web site and the advertising is refreshingly unobtrusive." We beat both flg21's own site (www.flg21.com) and Internet Magazine's Site of the Month in November, 007.com!**
www.internet-magazine.com

New Ecommerce Solutions

Value:
Unix and NT plans starting from £ 9.95 per month including domain name registration.

Point of technology:
handling over 500,000 emails per day and 1.5 billion hits per month... with ease!



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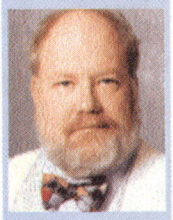
OVERHEARD → "Cast your mind back to a time when PCs nicked villans and Macs were rainwear for dodgy geezers," a quote from The Sun's Web site.

Time line

3 February
Eugene Spafford wrote the book on Internet security that you – or your Web administrator – use every day. He'll be giving the after-dinner talk at the Internet Society's Conference in San Diego this evening (PDT), and will probably



manage to sober up a lot of well-oiled network managers. Serves them right for leaving holes in their systems.
www.isoc.org

14 February
The Net is jammed by thousands of electronic Valentines cards. Or not.

15 February
Everyone else will be in Cannes for MILIA, but the serious people will be in Innsbruck for the IASTED International Conference on Applied Informatics. Because getting prizes for your Web site is one thing,

ISPs struggle to make freecall access work

Freephone ISP heads for the great provider graveyard

Swindon-based ISP, SkyTrak 800, which offered freecall access for a subscription fee of £7.50 a month, has become the latest casualty in the ongoing 0800 ISP fiasco.

Robert Taylor at the Trading Standards department at Swindon Borough Council told us: "It looks like a case of a good idea, but the company simply couldn't fulfil its promises. There's no evidence of any criminal activity, so there is not a lot we can do."

Even *Internet Magazine* was caught out. Last month we ran a feature on the many different free ISP models on offer, and it seemed to us that 0800Skytrak was a good bet.

When we spoke to Toni Siddle, the owner of the ISP, he seemed confident that his version of the freecall ISP could work. "I had several conversations with the MD and the service worked well," said Steve Patient, who wrote the free ISP article. "He claimed the charges covered the cost of 0800 lines, which seemed feasible." Sadly it seems that what could have been a popular option has failed.

The SkyTrak 800 site has been taken down and Siddle is not answering the phone. While it has been suggested on Internet newsgroups that he has done a runner, it seems he is just lying low.

The Trading Standards Officer did confirm that a "substantial amount of money" was owed in unpaid bills to BT. Unconfirmed reports suggest that the figure could be as high as £1.6 million. And this doesn't include the fees subscribers claim are owed to them as refunds.

The news comes at a time when ISPs are struggling to make the freecall access model work, with the likes of Screaming.net, 08004U, and GreatXscape hitting the headlines for all the wrong reasons.
www.tradingstandards.gov.uk

:-) Kids these days!

An 11 year old from North London has embarrassed luxury crystal makers Waterford, by taking thousands of order enquiries for its goods on his Web site. James Stell claims to have taken attempted orders worth £40,000 a week at his site at **www.waterfordcrystal.com**. One single order of chandeliers was worth thousands of pounds alone. Web consultancy Reading Room (**www.readingroom.net**) is advising. "Imagine what money they could be making with a decent site!" Reading Room's Margaret Manning said.
www.waterford-usa.com

Netbenefit buys Netnames

Domain name company snaps up rival

NetBenefit, a domain name registration and hosting company, has bought its main rival, NetNames for approximately £1.1 million in cash and 2,889,445 new NetBenefit ordinary shares. The new company is likely to become a formidable force in the industry.

"NetBenefit has a consistent track record of converting domain name customers into purchasers of a broad range of related products," said Jonathan Robinson, CEO of NetBenefit. "And it's arguably the highest profile name in the UK and International domain name industry."
www.netbenefit.com
www.netnames.co.uk

BOOKMARKS OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS

It's singer and songwriter...

Pete Townshend

Born into a musical family in London at the end of the Second World War, Townshend was the creative force behind one of the most outspoken groups ever to emerge – The Who. Today he is working in the music industry and has a loyal following among aging Mods.

What do you like most about the Net?
The ability to destroy international boundaries. Unfortunately the Internet is full of liars. When Kosovo was happening, we heard what was going on from locals on the ground, but we didn't really know if they were telling the truth.

What do you dislike?
Porn sites that don't properly bar underage surfers. I used to quite like American and European porn. I now fear our communal subconscious is being sullied by utterly horrific images coming out of Russia. Maybe I'm just being a prude.

What has been the effect of the Net on music?
The Web is already revolutionising the distribution of music. It will also revolutionise music itself. I'd like a system that lets me to put stuff straight onto my site on a whim. I'm not quite there yet because I still have to go through my hosting company.

SO WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE WEB SITES?

Pete Townshend
www.petetownshend.co.uk
Created by Web designers Clockwork Web, it includes a mix of images and music.

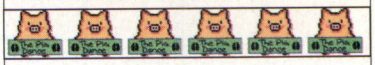
Cow Dance

www.cowdance.com
See the dancing cows and listen to some wonderful MIDI music. Inspired by notorious dancing baby and dancing hamster.

Fishy Dance

www.fishydance.com
They're fish and they dance. A variety of tropical, cold water and marine fish dance for your delight.

Pig Dance
http://pigdance.freeservers.com
Here you can squeal the night away. [I think we can say that we've grasped the sort of sites that interest Pete!]

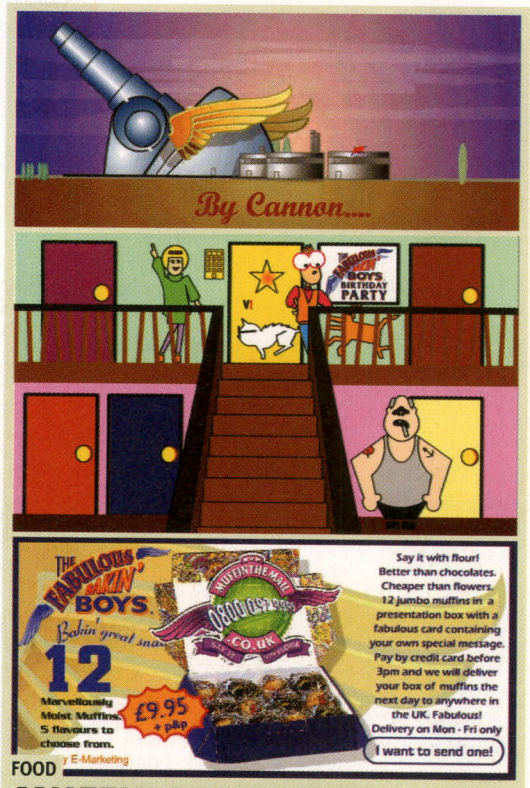


For more about see
www.petetownshend.co.uk

OVERHEARD → "The Internet industry is like the pop industry used to be – everyone wants to get into it." Bob Geldof tells First Tuesday why he started Deckchair.com

EssentialViewing

The Web is huge and phone calls are expensive. So save time and money and only visit this month's essential sites



FOOD

MUFFIN PERSONAL

The Fabulous Bakin' Boys have launched not one, but two micro sites this month. First up is a 'virtual birthday party' site to commemorate the bakers' second birthday. Once through the front door, you can explore each room of the house, playing games and music. The other newcomer is the company's first e-commerce site. Complete with top slogan, Say it with Flour, the new Muffin the Mail site lets you send a box of 12 muffins (at £14.90) for those special occasions when flowers or chocolates just won't do.

www.bringabottle.co.uk
www.muffinthemail.co.uk

SHOPPING

After the inauspicious launch of Boo.com (**www.boo.com**) comes a redesign for trendy online retailer The Clothes Store. The e-commerce site has secure ordering, and features brands such as Fred Perry, Kickers and Ben Sherman. It's a lot faster than Boo thanks to simpler design and a lot less Flash.

www.theclothesstore.com

To go with those smart new togs, you'll need an arresting aroma to complete the package. At Interscent, you can get men's and women's fragrances at wholesale prices.

www.interscent.co.uk

If smells aren't your bag, what about talking books? While the likes of Amazon (**www.amazon.co.uk**) and Bol (**www.bol.co.uk**) concentrate on print, Books Aloud deals solely in audio tapes, or what the RNIB calls talking books. From Postman Pat and The Famous Five to Dick Francis and Shakespeare, there's an excellent selection.

www.booksaloud.co.uk

The team behind the 'shares for subscription' ISP Blue Carrots has launched CarrotShop.com what it claims is the UK's first online cashback shopping community. The retail site lists over one million items, all with savings of up to 15 per cent.

www.carrotshop.com

And to go with your veg, why not try some exotic meat? A brace of pheasants, perhaps? Or organic beef? Whatever your carniverous desire, Meat Direct can supply it.

www.meatdirect.co.uk

And if you're chasing your food around your plate thanks to poor eyesight, you can order your contact lenses online with Direct Lenses.

www.direct lenses.com

BUSINESS TO BUSINESS

If you're in the TV industry, particularly in advertising, the Bullet will be right up your alley. The site features media news, reviews of the day's essential programmes, a roundup of TV stories in the broadsheets, TV rumours and plenty of media links.

www.the-bullet.com

If you're planning a spot of corporate hospitality but don't know where to begin, why not try EventWise? The site has an events diary, online help and a venue search facility.

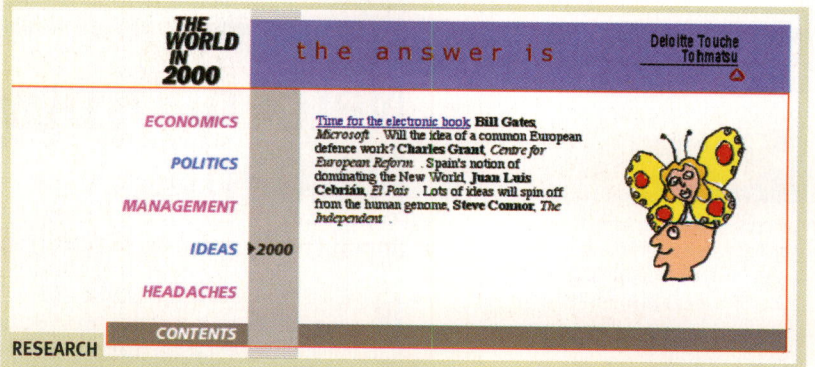
www.eventwise.net

SPORT

The Football News umbrella site lists an impressive 10,000 individual club, player and referee micro sites. As well as the Premiership, Divisions 1, 2 and 3, and the Vauxhall Conference, Football News is the only site to deal with the sport at county level. You also get full Scottish, Irish and Welsh coverage, for a grand total of 150 leagues on the site.

www.footballnews.co.uk

But if you fancy less spectating and more action, how about a spot of skiing?

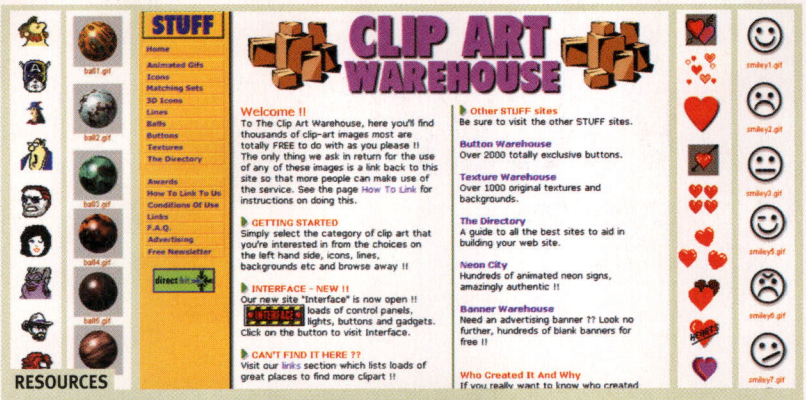


RESEARCH

SITE OF THE YEAR 2000?

If you're completely lost as to the state of the world, *The Economist* has launched a special site to help. The World In 2000 Web site displays a full list of contents and gives you a series of full length articles taken from the printed version, with more to follow throughout the year. Guest writers include Bill Gates, Chris Patten and Kofi Annan.

www.theworldin.com



RESOURCES

GREAT WORKS OF CLIP ART

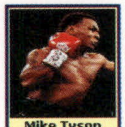
Way back in 1997, The Clip Art Warehouse became popular due to a link from the Link Exchange and mentions in the media. But this led to the site using too much bandwidth and it was thrown off its server in 1998. Now it's back up and running, so if you want to embellish a leaflet or a Web site for free, check it out. You won't be disappointed, as there are thousands of images, animated GIFs, buttons and textures to choose from.

www.clipart.co.uk

SkiPages.com
your complete ski and snowboard directory

SkiPages incorporates the popular ski search engine ski-search.com (**www.ski-search.com**) and has a veritable chaletful of worldwide resort reviews, snow reports and ski-related products to buy.

www.skipages.com


Mike Tyson Warrens Got him

Away from the slopes and on the ropes is the newly launched UK boxing site, Boxing Press. You'll find up to the minute boxing news and views, a chatroom, results and a schedule of forthcoming fights.

www.boxingpress.com

GIFT CERTIFICATES

There seems to be a trend this month for sites that deal in gift certificates. First up is GloboGift, a gift certificate service intended for those of you sending gifts internationally. Choose from a number of high-profile department stores around the world, order your gift certificates and sit back feeling generous.

www.globogift.com

Also prowling around is Clever Cat. This site only offers gift vouchers for shops in the US, but if you have an American colleague or relative you'd like to send something, this could be the ideal present.

www.clevercat.com

VALENTINE'S DAY

Yes it's that time of year again, so out with the champagne, flowers and diamond necklaces. The Best of British has dedicated a section of its site to offering a choice of gifts for your loved one, ranging from Janet Raeger lingerie to Bendicks chocolates.

www.thebestofbritish.com/shop/gifts

If you crave something more exotic, or would like to know the history of this lovers' day, visit Aristotle's Valentine's page. Here you'll find an exhaustive list of suitable links, all displayed as chocolates in a heart-shaped box. Dead classy.

www.aristotle.net/valentines

AND FINALLY

NetAid (**www.netaid.org**) might have been a bit of a washout in terms of online donations, but there's another chance to show you care. Online charity, Peace One Day is asking the global population to abstain from killing each other for one day, and raising awareness of the United Nations International Day of Peace 'Hear the Children' Day.

www.peaceoneday.org

TECHUPDATE

ALL THE LATEST INTERNET TECHNOLOGY NEWS

■ Olitec's range of self-memory modems can now automatically retrieve email, even when your PC is switched off. Its Directmail software downloads your messages and stores them in its flash memory. It'll even retain your mail if there's a power cut.

www.olitec.co.uk

■ BT and Canada's Northern Telecom have a lead in the race to develop IP telephony (phone calls over the Internet) after producing a new system with the sound quality of a traditional network. As part of a pilot scheme, BT's Spanish unit has already switched its clients to the new system. The technology's cost £74 million to develop, but should cut the cost of voice calls dramatically.

www.bt.com

● BT is testing cheap phone calls over the Internet

■ Hitachi has launched the first smart card designed specifically for children. KidCard will let young people buy goods and services over the Net through a low cost smart card reader. The system can identify users and control access to adult material.

www.hitachi.com

■ Stephen Byers, secretary of state at the DTI, has become the first cabinet minister to digitally sign a document. "Our Electronic Communications Bill is a key part of the vision," said Byers. "The Bill will bring Britain's laws into the 21st century, giving legal recognition to electronic signatures." You can see the digital signature on the Web site of InterForum, the e-commerce campaign group.

www.interforum.org

■ With more people using Linux, Adobe has released versions of its Acrobat Distiller and Framemaker software for the platform. The company says it regards Linux as a significant platform to help companies build their Internet infrastructure. "Adobe monitors its markets closely to keep appraised of customer trends and requirements, and we've seen a growing interest in Linux," said a spokesperson.

www.adobe.co.uk

● Adobe has released new products for Linux users

Have you clicked yet?

So called 'free' Internet service providers give you free access to the net – but you are charged for every single Internet call you make. Whereas with ClaraNET, a monthly subscription of just £5.99 gives you 12 FREE HOURS of evening and weekend Internet call time.

For real Internet value, ClaraNET is right on the button.

ClaraNET

www.clara.net

0845 355 1000

- Unlimited email addresses
- 24 hr support line at local rates
- 50MB webspace

OVERHEARD→ "And who is Dot Com?" Exert from a seriously patronising radio advert for WH Smith Online.

Time line

but understanding Service Level Management in ATM Networks is the only thing that will keep the Internet running long enough for anyone to make any money.
www.iasted.com/conferences/2000/austria/ai.htm

16 February

If you don't have your own IP backbone and a few gigabits per second of data transfer to

spare, you won't be welcome at the 'Carrier IP World Forum 2000' in Miami.
www.iec.org/events/2000/carrieripwf

17 February

Windows 2000 is released. As if you didn't know.
www.microsoft.com

29 February

Will it... won't it? Today's a leap day, but most years ending in 00 aren't. Is your scheduler keeping up? And how about the computers running the Internet?

Sony to form Net bank

Electronics retailer begins the move to complete online retailing

In what is the clearest sign yet that Sony aims to sell its products direct to consumers on the Web, it's launched its own online banking service.

The service, which will be launched in the next two years, will allow consumers to pay their bills for music, movies and games over the Web.

It will also let consumers apply for small loans and pay public utility charges online. The banking unit is likely to be created through the takeover of an existing bank.

"Discussions will take place over the coming months in order to provide the best service in the field of finance for individual customers in the Net era," a spokesman for Sony said.

The move is part of a vision drawn up by Sony's president Nobuyuki Idei, who is transforming the company into what he calls a "Web department store" selling goods and services through a digital network.

"We are not simply trying to provide distribution networks. What we are aiming for is to become a department store that handles everything that can be distributed through our digital networks," Idei said in a newspaper interview.

Last year, Sony stated that it would distribute games over the Net. The PlayStation 2 console will be equipped with a modem and facilities to download games.

● Online banking: part of a bigger plan for Sony

The Sony also owns a telecom infrastructure in Japan and is installing large capacity optic fibre networks in a joint venture with Toyota Motor Corporation.

While in the short-term the move is unlikely to yield large profits, it will be important for acquiring customer data and future sales.

www.sony.com

Doubts cast over First-e

First-e, the Internet bank, has denied reports in *The Mirror* that it was loosing money from some of its accounts. The tabloid newspaper reported that the bank was unable to work out which customers more than £300,000 belonged to.

General manager Richard Thackray described the stories as "rubbish" and insisted that all customers' money was safe. He went on to say that some money was not credited to people's accounts immediately because the data that accompanied it – such as account numbers, sort codes, and customer names – was missing or incorrect. In some cases, customers sent cheques or cash which the bank does not accept.

● Where did that £300,000 go?

***The Mirror* story originated from an anonymous email posted to some customers and a newsgroup.**

www.firste.com

ISP ROUND-UP

■ **AOL UK has launched a new area of its portal to provide information and specialist resources about healthcare, fitness and well-being. Featuring exclusive healthcare content, chat areas and links to other sites, the area was developed in response to demand for reliable, up to date information on health and lifestyle issues.**
www.aol.co.uk

■ Over 40,000 users signed a petition from 4theNet.co.uk demanding that Net users receive unmetered local calls. While BT has now offered the service, the ISP says that it should be at an affordable price.
www.4thenet.co.uk

■ **Totalise gives average user of its service £24 in tradable shares a month. An average user is someone who spends around about 18 minutes a day online.**
www.totalise.net

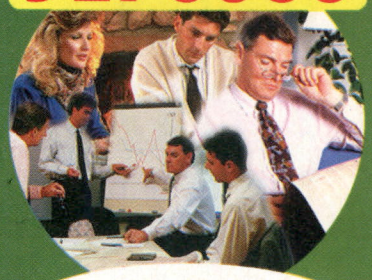
■ UUNET is carrying out trials of ADSL. The service — targeted at SMEs — will be available once BT complete the preparation of its local exchanges for ADSL traffic.
www.uk.uu.net

■ Subscription-free Internet access is on the increase in the US, following an announcement by cable access provider ExciteHome that it would launch an ISP soon. Portal site Yahoo!(www.yahoo.com) was also reported to be on the verge of announcing a similar deal. As the US telephone structure is different, ISPs cannot make money from interconnection fees the way they do in the UK.
www.home.net

■ **Demon Internet, one of the UK's biggest ISPs, has become the most popular Web hosting company. According to figures from Netcraft, Demon hosts 154,785 Web sites, making it the UK's number one and seventh in the world.**
www.demon.net

Welcome to Seriously Easy E-COMMERCE

CALL NOW: 0115 9170000



THE NEW WEBFUSION BUSINESS E-COMMERCE

ALL THESE FEATURES

100Mb fast UK webspace, all domain fees, www.yourname.co.uk, POP3 email, unlimited addresses, auto-responders, announcement lists, CGI-bin + pre-installed scripts, Frontpage extensions, support for PHP3, MySQL, RealAudio, fast responsive tech support, online help & web-based Virtual Control Panel

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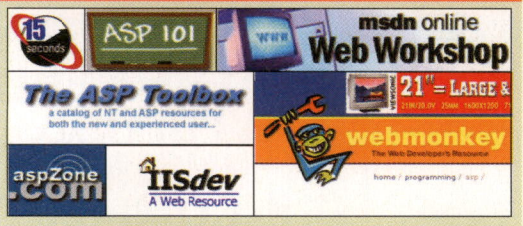
HotDownloads

ON THE CD

After trawling sites all over the world, **Greg Sloman** brings you the products worth downloading. Plus the top 10 sites for ASP developers

HOTLIST

Top 10 ASP Developers



4GuysFromRolla.com
www.4guysfromrolla.com/webtech/faq/faqtoc.shtml
This feature-packed site is based on FAQs and has almost everything a beginner or advanced developer could want.

Webmonkey
http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/programming/asp/index.html
Step by step tutorials and syntax demos for beginners.

The Programmer's Resource
www.programmersresource.com/aspsource.asp
Cut and paste the pre-written scripts to get instant ASP.

ASP 101
www.asp101.com/home/home.asp
You'll find plenty of sample scripts, tips, resources and competitions on this site, as well as a lively ASP forum.

ASP Toolbox
www.tcp-ip.com
This is a resource for new and experienced coders with news, advice, tutorials, code snippets and book reviews.

Microsoft Web Workshop
http://msdn.microsoft.com/workshop/server/asp/aspover.asp
Microsoft's introduction to ASP includes developer tools and samples, 'how to' articles and documentation.

aspZone.com
www.aspzone.com
Aimed at intermediate and advanced developers, with programming features, discussions, news and tutorials.

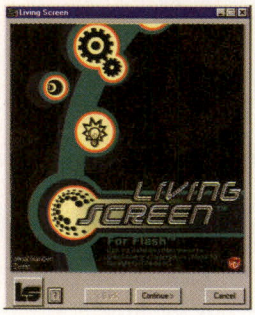
IIS Development
www.alphasierrapapa.com/iisdev
The companion site to Teach Yourself ASP in 24 Hours. You can download free components and ASP code.

15 Seconds
www.15seconds.com
All the news from the ASP community, plus articles from the major ASP sites.

Learn ASP.com
www.learnasp.com
Get free tutorials, components and code for your site.

Living Screen

Living Screen is a nifty tool that creates screensavers from Flash animations. A simple, five-step wizard lets you convert your Flash project into a Windows screensaver that you can give to your clients or add to your Web site. If you've created an interactive Flash project, Living Screen can retain these features as well as the sound. All you have to do is define how the screensaver is deactivated.



This could be a Quit button or an Escape key. The program also lets you personalise your screensaver using a bitmap graphic, email address and URL.
Price *$149 (around £97)*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *3.6Mb*
www.livingscreen.com

FastStats

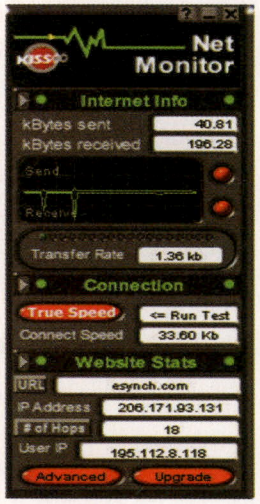
Each time visitors look at your Web site, they leave an electronic trail of data behind them. FastStats is an excellent logfile analyser that wades through millions of bits of data and provides you with readable charts and graphs. The program can analyse 25Mb of logfiles in just 30 seconds. You can export its reports to a Word document or an HTML format for browsing at a later date.
Price *$99.95 (around £65)*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *1.9Mb*
www.mach5.com/fast

NetMonitor

NetMonitor sits in your system tray and monitors your Internet connection. It shows the number of kilobytes received and sent, and graphically represents your transfer rate in real time. It features a keep-alive function that prevents your ISP from pulling the plug on your inactivity. You can also conduct a simple test to determine your true connection speed. It looks good, it's easy to use, and it's free.
Price *Free*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *663k*
www.kissco.com

WebWasher

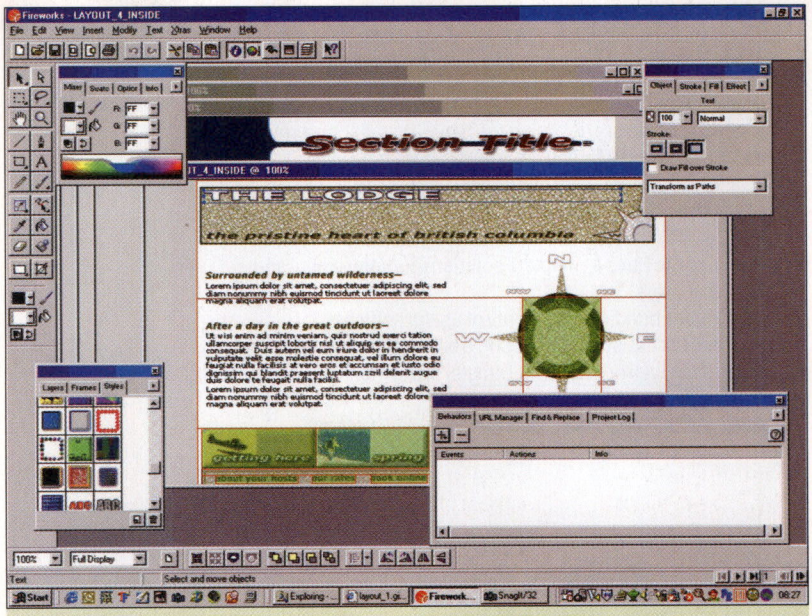
WebWasher could help to speed up your browsing by getting rid of unwanted banner ads and pop-up windows. It's easy to configure, and you get step by step instructions for using it with your favourite browser. You can customise WebWasher by simply adding URLs or pop-up window dimensions. You also get a set of options and



AMORPHIUM

This 3D package is for people who are having problems with their 3D modelling. Amorphium uses virtual clay that you can bend, twist, gouge, poke, scale, fatten, flatten, morph and smooth into complex 3D shapes. You can even paint direct onto your 3D creations. Your final work can be built into an animated GIF. Your first efforts might look like a child's plasticine model, though, which is why we've used a professional screenshot!
Price *$150 (around £97.50)*
Platforms *Mac/Win9x/NT*
Download Size *10.3Mb/11.3Mb*
www.amorphium.com

OVERHEARD → "We're doing as much business in a week now as we did in the last seven months of 1998." A spokesman for Charles Schwab on the rise of online share trading



FIREWORKS

Version 3 of Fireworks has a raft of new design, automation and integration features. You can preview optimization and rollover effects in the workspace, use Photoshop images and filters, clean up MS Word HTML, and export in Shockwave format. You can also automatically insert Fireworks HTML and graphics into Dreamweaver pages.

Price *£149*
Platforms *Mac/Win9x/NT*
Download size *12.2Mb/14.3Mb*
www.macromedia.com

statistics based on your browsing habits.

Price *Free*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *758Kb*
www.siemens.de/servers/wwash

Media Center Plus

Media Center Plus helps you organise your image, audio and animation files, making them easier to find and use. The program can view or play 33 image formats, 13 vector image formats, three audio formats and five animation formats. You can use Media Center Plus to acquire images from scanners and digital cameras. It also lets you run slideshows, export your albums in HTML or text formats, and convert images into other formats.

Price *$19 (around £12)*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *1.3Mb*
www.jasc.com

CoolEdit 2000

CoolEdit, the popular integrated home recording studio has just got better. CoolEdit 2000 is a digital

audio recorder and editor for your PC. Once you've recorded your music (or audio clips), you can edit it, add effects, or prepare it for CD on your computer. This latest update adds MP3 encoding capabilities, including support for audio plug-ins, which improves mixing capabilities and audio restoration.

Price *$69 Full (around £45)*
$39 Lite (around £25)
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *7.56Mb*
www.syntrillium.com

Screen Loupe

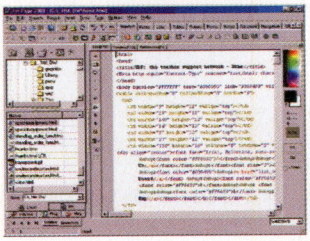
Screen Loupe is a useful utility that lets you magnify objects on your screen. This is great for seeing small print or detailed graphics close up without having to use the zoom command of your other programs. Keyboard shortcuts let you lock or select a fixed view, which can magnify a specific area of your screen.

Price *$20 (around £13)*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *135k*
www.execpc.com/~sbd/Loupe.html

1ST PAGE 2000

1st Page 2000 is a free HTML and script authoring tool for beginners or professionals. This powerful tool comes with an impressive HomeSite-style interface and a comprehensive set of features. It also includes hundreds of scripts for JavaScripts, DHTML, Perl and CGI. Best of all, it's free.

Price *Free*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *4.9Mb*
www.evrsoft.com



SMILEY GUIDE TO INTERNET USERS

KIDZ.NET

AGE: Seven year olds with 35 year old parents from Surrey.
APPEARANCE: Scruffy, worn-out blazer and tie, the latest fashionable bag and trainers, and knee-length socks.
HANGOUTS: The school playground, hanging around outside newsagents, their best friend's house and the back seat of their parents' Volvo.
KNOWN ASSOCIATES: Other kids.
LIKES: Manchester United, Nintendo, Pokémon and collecting football stickers or Barbies. Chatting to a new friend in Brazil, the Disney Web site and reading *Smash Hits*.
HATES: Their maths teacher, eating sprouts, tidying their room, being forced to use the Net for educational purposes, and being kissed by auntie at Christmas.
PHILOSOPHY: Play hard, play hard.
LATEST FAD: Bidding for expensive antique toys and small aircraft at eBay using Dad's credit card. Cracking the code for all sorts of adult content-filtering software.
MOST LIKELY TO SAY: "Please Dad, let me stay up past nine o'clock!"
LEAST LIKELY TO SAY: "Mum, Dad, we must use the Net less – have you seen the size of this phone bill?", "The Net is so beneficial to my moral and spiritual development."
MORE FROM: www.kidz.net

EICON DIVA USB

PRICE £99
CONTACT Eicon Technology
TEL (020) 8967 8000
www.eicon.com

For those that fancy browsing the Net at faster speed than 56k, an ISDN modem could be just the job. The DIVA USB is the smallest and lightest available.

External modems might not be the most sexy computer peripherals in the world, but the DIVA USB's unique design makes it stand out from the crowd. Stylish in black, but available in other colours, the DIVA is as small as a mouse. Who ever said modems had to be dull?

Because it's USB, it's portable and doesn't need its own power supply. It was designed with the novice user in mind so it's dead easy to set up. Using the handy installation wizards, you'll be browsing the Net at 128kpbs in no time at all. Just plug it in, and your the PC will automatically detect the device and configure the correct drivers.

The DIVA is being marketed at the home and small office user, and provides a complete solution for professional and technical users.

It comes bundled with plenty of useful software, including a personal fax assistant, RVS-COM, a basic telephone answering machine as well as a Eurofile Transfer facility for fast ISDN-based file transfers.

● See our full review on page 134

Photograph: Mike Harding

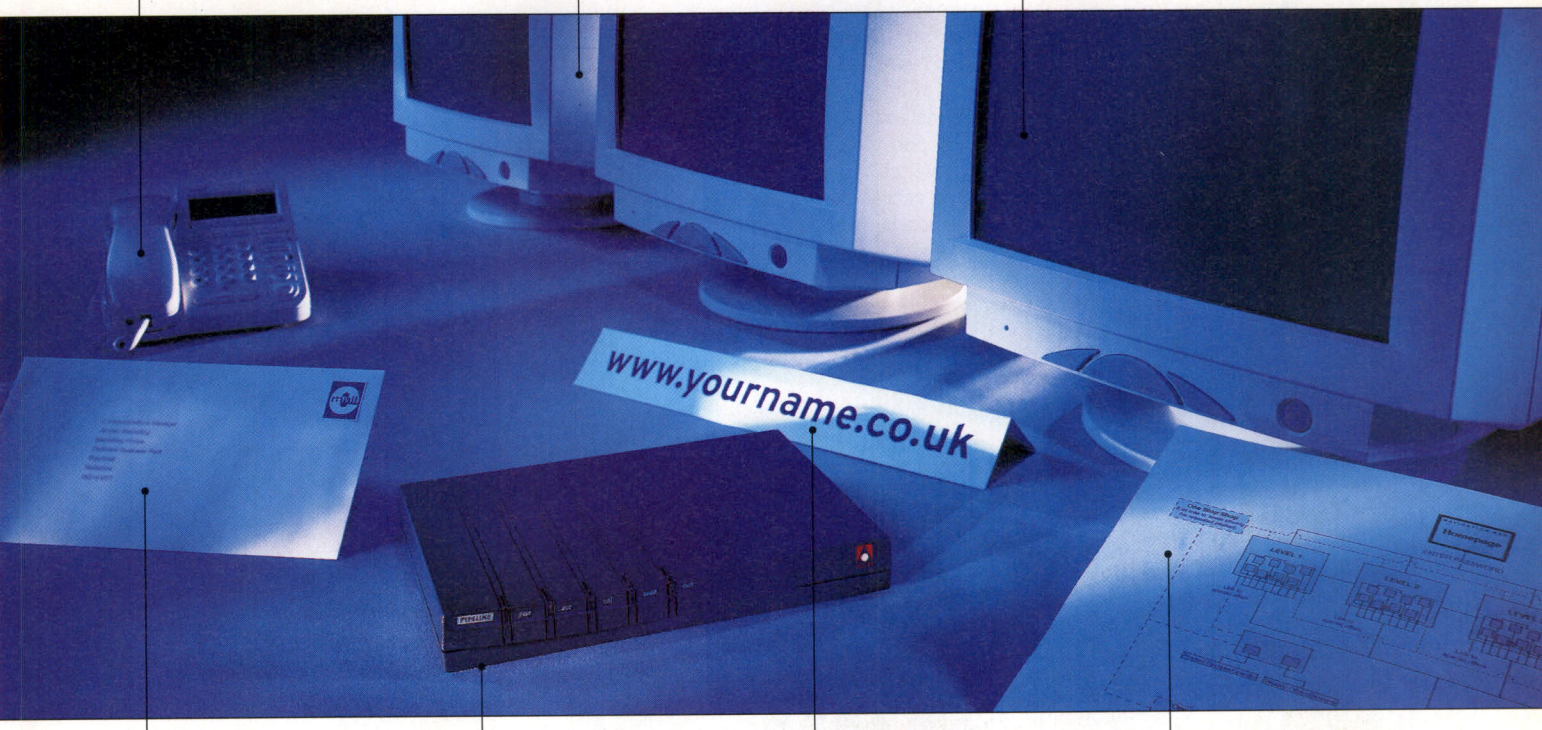
THE INCLUSIVE BUSINESS PACKAGE

INCLUSIVE
Technical Support
7 days a week - your business will always have help to hand. Our dedicated technical support team is there to help.

INCLUSIVE
Lan connectivity
A fast, 128k digital dial-on-demand service provides full, simultaneous Internet access for staff. Being dial-on-demand, you only pay when you are using the service- a local rate call*

* A 64k connection is a local rate call. 128k connections are two 0845 local calls bonded together.

INCLUSIVE
25Mb of Web space
25Mb of Web space within your domain (http://www.yourcompany.co.uk) is allocated for your business use (subject to the operating terms and conditions on our Web Site).



INCLUSIVE
Unlimited e-mail addresses
Every employee in your company will have their own e-mail address.

INCLUSIVE
Pre-configured router & firewall
Routers are configured to each individual customer's requirements. In addition, an integrated firewall protects your network from intruders.

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Domain name registration
Unique domain name to identify your company (yourcompany.co.uk).

WEB DESIGN
Option
To complete your Business Package, a bespoke design service is available to promote your company, product and services on the Web.

£550
£646.25 INC VAT

The Enterprise Business Package offers everything to get you onto the Web, including hardware, a unique domain name (yourcompany.co.uk - subject to availability) and infinite e-mail addresses.

Connecting to the Internet via Enterprise could not be more straightforward. We take care of the technical issues to ensure your Internet LAN service is on-line as seamlessly and as quickly as possible. To find out how you can benefit from the Enterprise Business Package contact our sales staff on our dedicated telephone sales line or by e-mail at sales@enterprise.net.

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sales@enterprise.net

OVERHEARD → "Page 3 of The Sun is world famous, but turning it into a Web site is a stroke of genius." An easily impressed Page 3 'stunner' gives her verdict of page3.com

TRENDSPOTTING

Our survey says...

The Pace Report 2000 is an annual survey into consumers' feelings about television, home shopping and the current issues related to digital technology. A survey of 1004 randomly selected adults in the UK was carried out by Gallup in September 1999

A common belief among many in the Internet industry is the UK public is unexcited about the introduction of digital TV. But the results of the Pace Report (www.pace.co.uk) offer encouragement to individuals or businesses that are thinking about investing in digital technology. Forty two per cent of respondents – rising to 64 per cent of 16 to 35 year olds – believe they'll have adopted digital TV by 2002. The figures suggest that analogue transmissions could end as early as 2006, rather than 2010, which is the date proposed by the Government.

The bad news is only 55 per cent of people knew that digital TV could allow access to email and the Internet. This compared badly with other features. For instance, 80 per cent recognised that digital TV offers a large number of channels, and 72 per cent of respondents recognised that interactive shopping and banking facilities are already available. Only eight per cent said the use of Internet and email would be a main reason to switch to using digital.

Fifty two per cent of the survey said they'd prefer to access the Internet and email on a PC, compared to 21 per cent using digital TV. Respondents also said they'd prefer to use a PC for communication with live video, playing games and home banking. Only home shopping was seen as a suitable activity for digital TV.

In May 1999, Datamonitor estimated that there would be 67 million homes with interactive TV across the US and Europe by 2003, creating a mass market of consumers to shop and bank through their television. The Asia Pacific region is also experiencing a surge in digital broadcasting services.

Many questions remain over the future of digital TV and interactive services in the UK. Open (www.open-here.co.uk) was launched in October 1999 from HSBC and is used by Sky Digital for interactive TV, but it doesn't give you access to the Net. You can email through Open though – the company has announced that 200,000 people have signed up to use its email facility.

In the short-term, digital TV is unlikely to have a major effect on the development of the Net. The main focus of the digital TV companies is establishing a broad subscriber-base on which the new industry can be built. The companies' main concerns will be improving the choice of channels, rather than Internet services. This is particularly the case at present, as few people seem to want interactive TV services.

Yahoo! introduces new online payment system

Popular search engine's new e-bills allow for online billing in the US

Yahoo! has introduced a free online payment service for its registered users. Known as Yahoo! E-Bills, the service lets members pay bills (such as their credit card balance) online. The new function will connect to Yahoo! Bill Pay, so members can complete their monthly bill-paying entirely online for a minimal fee.

The service has been made possible by the company's alliance with CheckFree, an electronic payments site, and is secured by Yahoo!'s Security Key password system and the SSL security standard.

The transactions will be conducted on the CheckFree Web site (www.checkfree.com), with a guarantee against processing delays and unauthorised transactions.

Jupiter Research forecasts that the number of US households using online bill-paying services will grow to 18 million by 2003.

www.yahoo.com

● US users can pay their bills while searching the Net

COMPETITION WINNERS

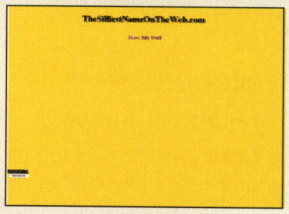
The winners of the Silverstone competition in our September issue were Robert Berry of Nuneaton and Caroline Noon of Surbiton. They both enjoyed a day at the Silverstone Autumn Gold Cup courtesy of Web hosts Server World (www.serverworld.co.uk).

CORRECTION

The installation details of Which? Online (www.which.net) were confused with that of another ISP in the *Best ISP on the Planet* feature (December 1999). Our comments should have read: "The long-winded CD does the hard sell on the paid service over the free one. It also loaded Netscape 4.5 over Netscape 4.6."

THE WILD, WILD WEB

■ As the URL suggests, this site is rather silly. You can click on the links to swap between pages that say 'More silly stuff' and 'Less silly stuff'. But unlike the black hole site (www.ravenna.com/blackhole.html), which is completely pointless, this silly site lets you email the webmaster with silly stories – how they'll be used if they appear on the site is unclear. But you can join a silly mailing list, so the site could well be planning to send your titilating tales to fellow visitors.



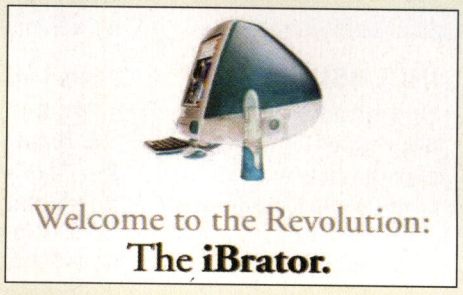
www.thesilliestnameontheweb.com

■ **Many personal home pages put pictures of their kids online, but this site probably takes the biscuit, or the Farleys rusk to be more accurate. Parents in Virginia, US, have put up a page of baby snaps. This might not sound unusual, but their daughter is only two days old (in the pictures taken just before Christmas) and she already has her own .com Web address and email address so you can say hello. These messages will be read to her and stuck in the baby book. Maxine Marie McCuller is truly a member of the new 'I generation'.**

www.maxmcculler.com

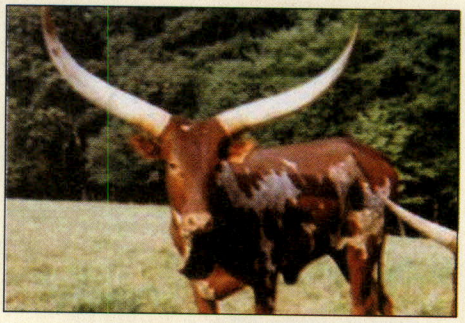
■ And talking of everything having an 'i' in it, after the success of the iMac comes the iBrator. It's a vibrator that's had an iMac makeover. You can't buy this creation, but there are some impressive visuals (none of which are distasteful). Our question is why?

www.ibrator.com/ibrator.html



■ **Instead of arguing about their country's beef exports, maybe politicians should learn to appreciate these bovine beasts. Allcows.com is for cow lovers and people who appreciate 'green' issues. "The cow is generous, calm and beautiful," says the site. We'll take your word for it. Check out cow news, cow of the month and Daisy's stamp collection, as well as great cow paintings.**

www.allcows.com



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Then don't waste time. Save them with the unbeatable speed of the new HP CD-Writer Plus 9210. The new SCSI drives from the World's No.1 in CD-Writers, give you ultimate performance. No matter how ambitious your project. So unleash your genius now.

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HEWLETT® PACKARD

PUSHING THE BOAT OUT

Travel on the Net is big business, but most traditional firms have been a bit slow on the uptake. Richard Dinnick books his ticket on a new departure for an old hand

As an island nation, sailing and ships should be in our blood. Setting off to sea for your holiday might not be the first option that springs to mind, but cruises are big business. With their classy image and air of days-gone-by luxury, most of us probably though we'd never see the inside of a cruise ship. Think again – now's you chance to see what the modern cruise liner really has to offer.

February 2000 internet magazine Site of the Month

Page & Moy is one of the UK's oldest cruise companies. The company has been responsible for people holiday's since 1962, but it was not until 37 years on, at the end of 1999, that Page & Moy made its first foray into the lucrative waters of online travel. And when I say lucrative, I mean it. Research by Datamonitor shows that the European online travel industry is expected to generate $1.7 billion (around £1 billion) in sales by 2002.

Page & Moy's plans for the Internet are ambitious to say the least. From a standing start with no Web presence in November '99, the aim is to have 11 fully functioning e-commerce Web sites by the end of this year. First up is the Page & Moy main site (**www.pagemoy.com**), which acts as a central access point for its various divisions.

As well as the links to the 10 other sites, this home page contains corporate information, job opportunities and a section called Real People, which tells you all about the experience and friendliness of Page & Moy's staff. This was included because, as it says on the site, the company felt that the Internet "can leave you feeling that you are living in a faceless society." It wants to reassure you that "behind the Page & Moy site is a company employing over 300 highly skilled people".

Visitors to the site can go down one of three routes. One takes you to the as yet unlaunched Go Now Travel site (**www.go-nowtravel.com**), the second to its business-to-business travel site, Worldwide Incentives (**www.wwincentives.com**), and the third to the true portal site, Individual and Escorted Tours (**www.page-moy.co.uk**). And it's this last options that is made up of the remaining seven sites in the network.

If you're gonna go, go now

The Go Now Travel site is a new departure for the holiday company – an online-only travel agency. Page & Moy doesn't offer a general travel agency service from its offices, but sees the Internet as the perfect way to branch out. "Go Now is a complete travel agent online," explains Aaron Chatterley, MD of site designers SP New Media (**www.spnewmedia.com**). "I believe it goes further down the travel route than the likes of LastMinute.com. In fact, I don't know if there's anything out there at the moment that can compete directly with Go Now because it's an independent that will sell you packages from all the major operators."

But your holiday isn't the only thing you can buy from Go Now. Mindful of similar sites offering travel reading and car hire, SP New Media came up with an innovative add-on for the Page & Moy site. "During a brainstorming session we were debating what value could we add to the site," says Chatterley. "We wanted something a bit different. It just so happens that we were also doing the development work on the new Clothes Store site (**www.theclothesstore.com**)and we came up with the bright idea of bringing the two together."

So the design company brokered the deal between its two clients.

PAGE & MOY

www.pagemoy.com

For showing what can be achieved when a traditional business truly embraces the Internet.

DESIGNERS
S P New Media

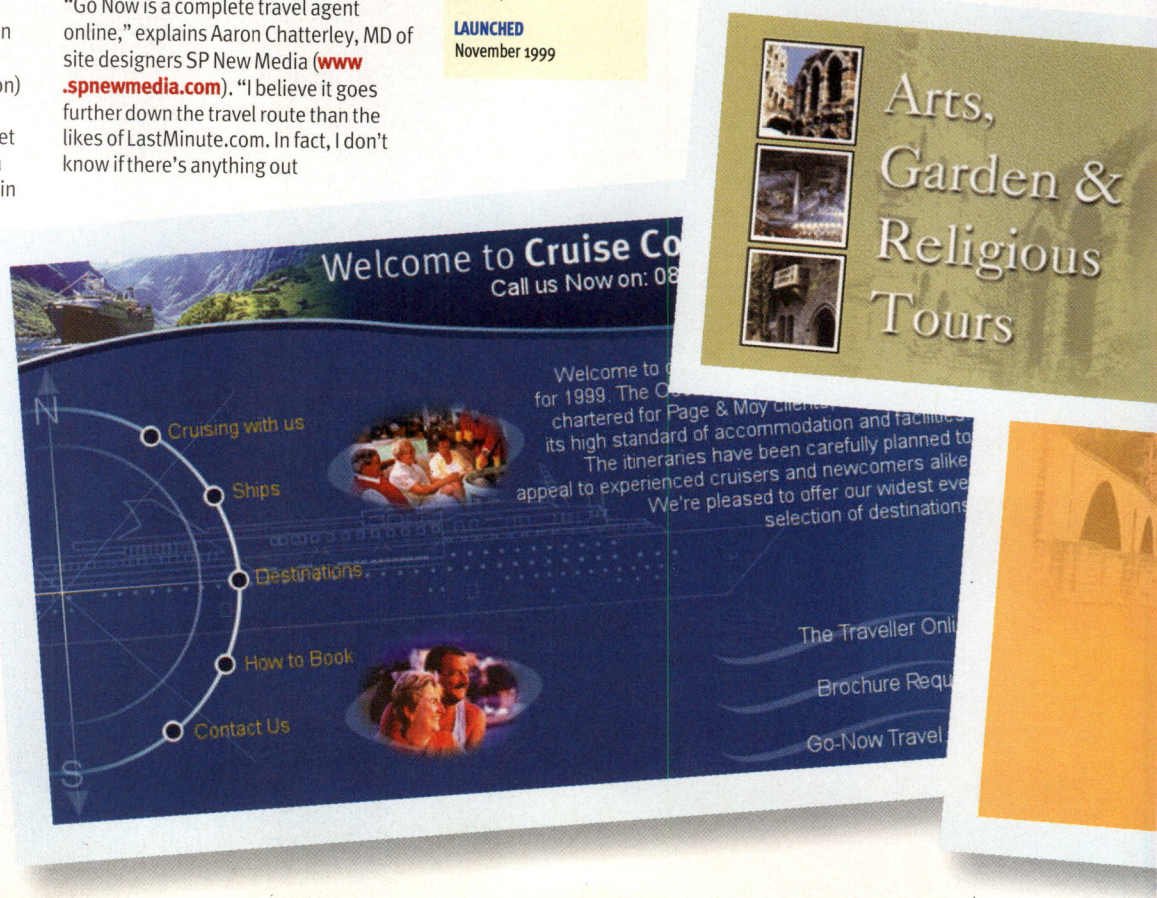
DEVELOPMENT TIME
Ten months

COST
Approximately £100,000 for the 11Web sites in the network.

SIZE
20 Mb so far. (But it will get a LOT bigger).

NUMBER OF PAGES
800 pages for cruises alone (estimate to be 6,000 pages in total).

LAUNCHED
November 1999



DESIGN PROFILE

SP New Media

SP New Media was set up in October 1997 to fill a perceived gap in the market. The company balances good design, technical ability and an appreciation of Web technology's business implications. SP New Media stresses that it is not simply a print-based graphic designer that has jumped on the Internet bandwagon. The agency also works beyond the design remit, helping clients to formulate their Internet strategies.

Aaron Chatterley, MD

Aaron Chatterley's career started with IBM as a programmer, followed by six years with Cable & Wireless where he was primarily involved in Internet technologies. Prior to helping set up SP New Media, he spent seven months with BT as an Internet Consultant assisting corporate clients in formulating Internet strategies. He has even appeared on SKY TV's *Chips with Everything* as a regular expert.

Hugh Wallace, Senior Internet Designer

After graduating with an MA in New Media Design from Oxford Brookes, Hugh Wallace was retained by the University to design and build sites promoting the Institution. Hugh went on to spend two years in this role before joining SP New Media in July 1999. Since then, he has been involved in site concept design for clients including Charles Schwab Europe as well as Page & Moy.

"We're not Online Magic, and we're not Syzergy. We wouldn't get away with charging the prices they do. But we're making a profit and we're growing."

Then it was up to the Clothes Store and Page & Moy to get together and work out the finer details. Its ability to put two clients together to mutual benefit probably signifies that SP New Media has arrived in the big kids' playground.

The contract has been a big winner for SP New Media, leading to new business leads and contracts. "Just showing [new clients] what we're doing and having the name of Page & Moy on our client list helps," Chatterley explains. And regardless of the client , this is a major e-commerce project. "That's the area of expertise most of our clients are going to want now," he says.

"These sites have been a major catalyst for our growth over the last 10 months," Chatterley confesses. "We hated doing it, but we were forced to turn some work away. Our guys already work over 12 hours a day." And it's working on more than just the Web site. SP New Media has been tasked with taking Go Now Travel from inception to launch, covering all the branding, logos, and other design issues. The site was also built with future developments in mind – making sure it'll be compatible with new technologies such as interactive television.

"None of the sites will ever truly be finished. They are all evolving, dynamic Web sites."

It's a business trip...

Travel isn't just about personal package holidays and transport. Many companies use it as an 'incentive', as part of a staff loyalty programme, as a brand extension or to promote themselves. Page & Moy specialises in providing this kind of business-to-business service.

The Worldwide Incentive site is aimed squarely at that market. It has information on loyalty schemes such as the one Page & Moy runs with supermarket giant Safeway, existing sales promotions with the likes of the *FT* and Fosters beer, incentives such as corporate hospitality, conferences and events, and incentive travel itself.

SP New Media has conveyed Page & Moy's professionalism through the inclusion of numerous case studies, including details of the brief and the tailored solution the travel company came up with. There are also 'specifics' and top tips for making your corporate incentive travel programme or travel promotion go as smoothly (after all, remember the Hoover flight offer fiasco) as possible.

Carry on cruising

But it's with the Individual and Escorted Tours site that the Page & Moy Network really hits its stride. Although the Cruise Collection (**www.cruisecollection.com**) is the only one of the seven sub-sites to have been launched so far, Chatterley is confident that the rest will measure up to its brilliance. "The Cruises site is one of the biggest, along with Motor Racing," he says. "Most of the others will be a third of the size, so Cruises represents a fairly hefty piece of work."

The other sites include Motor Racing Tours, which deals with special holidays to Le Mans and motor racing circuits around the globe, Holiday Selection which covers escorted tours, and a Hawaii & Paradise Island site that specialises in trips to the Pacific islands.

"The other sites will be more impressive than Cruise Collection because there will be more options open to us," Chatterley promises. "Page & Moy are the most enthusiastic people I have ever met. They are so committed to our industry it's almost frightening!" And this commitment has led to a Cruise site that's amazing in its own right.

The most impressive aspect of the Cruise Collection site has to be the virtual tour of Page & Moy's two cruise ships, the Black Prince and the Ocean Majesty. Anyone who has crossed the channel or the North Sea on a ferry will recognise the layout of the initial pages as a deck map, which shows the liners both in profile and plan.

All the cabins are visible, and colour-coded by price, so you can instantly see that an outer cabin on the upper deck is the most expensive, and that the ones tucked away in the bowels of the ship are somewhat cheaper. This is a helpful start, but you don't have to stop there. Clicking on the colour-coded square of your preferred cabin opens a new, smaller window. Within this is a illustration of the cabin's layout that's reminiscent of a Dorling Kindersley cutaway. Beside this a 360° BeHere (**www.behere.com**) image that, much like the similar panoramic technology of Ipix, lets you pan around images of the actual cabin to get a feel for its décor and space.

Not only has SP New Media given every cabin on both ships this treatment, the designers have also added other areas of the ships such as the leisure deck, lido lounge and even the bridge, in case you don't get invited up there by the Captain.

The only thing missing from the Cruise Collection site is online booking and availability, but Chatterley assures me that e-commerce functions are 'coming soon'. "We see improving the site as an ongoing process," he says. "So none of the sites will ever truly be finished. They are all evolving, dynamic Web sites. If you build a site that isn't, what's the point?"

What is your destination?

Page & Moy is keen for all the sites to be available to as many people as possible, so none will feature unnecessarily complicated technology that might act as a barrier to entry. "The bulk of the sites' design is no-frills HTML," Chatterley says. "There is a small amount of Java and an even tinier amount of Flash."

Even the Worldwide Incentives site, which has a both a Java and a Flash menu, is 'intelligent'. The site will look to see what type of browser you have, and select the menu that suits you best. This means that there are three or four different versions of the menu to let it cope with all browsers that are version three and above.

"The Worldwide Incentives site does have a fair amount of technology behind it, but the presentation here is critical," explains Chatterley. "The simple design is based around Page & Moy's branding requirements and our interpretation as designers. We tend to produce simple, clear, clean Web sites."

That is not to say that the Page & Moy network of sites is just a collection of online brochures. Far from it. "The site was designed around the idea that customers should have everything they need to make their decision, fairly and accurately," Chatterley says. "They should then be able to check availability and book the holiday."

As if to accentuate that this site is not brochureware, you'll find brochure request forms dotted about. This feature was an important inclusion, as Page & Moy carried out research that found its clients wanted to make up their minds later. "Everything that's in the brochures – and a lot more – is on the Web sites," admits Chatterley. "But it's also a data capture exercise. There are no cookies on this site. The only information we collect is the stuff clients are volunteering."

It's been an exceptionally well thought out, planned and executed site. And it had to be – primarily because of the massive amount of information that had to be included. The biggest achievement here is that everything a visitor needs to make a purchase decision (short of going and having a look at the real venue, racing track or European city) is on the sites. "Without proper planning it would have been very simple, with all that information, to make the Page & Moy network an incredibly confusing place to be," Says Chatterley. "As it is, the sites are nautical – but nice."

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Derek Scanlon
creative director
IXL
When reading that I could share my holiday with 'celebrities' like Alan Titchmarsh, I was convinced the site wouldn't be my 'scene'. This is, however, a clean, tidy site for luxury travel. There's simple navigation on What, Where, When, How much and How to Book. The cruise site is all based on an obvious compass metaphor, but uses the medium well in delivering 3D views of your cabin, contact numbers and a variety of package data. As with the 98 per cent of customers who would recommend a Page & Moy cruise, I would recommend this site.
www.ixl.co.uk

Daryn Forster
MD
FLG21
The highlight of the site is the Cruise Collection area. It offers all the info you might need to find your cruise holiday and even has a neat little Java Applet that lets you look around the ship. The 3D images are also interesting to look at. There should also be a 'phone me' button on every page so that the browser can be called back. We found the photography of pretty poor quality and once it has loaded has left most of us bored and ready to click off. All in all, the general consensus was that it has the potential to deliver so much more.
www.flg21.com

http://www.hp.com/go/drops
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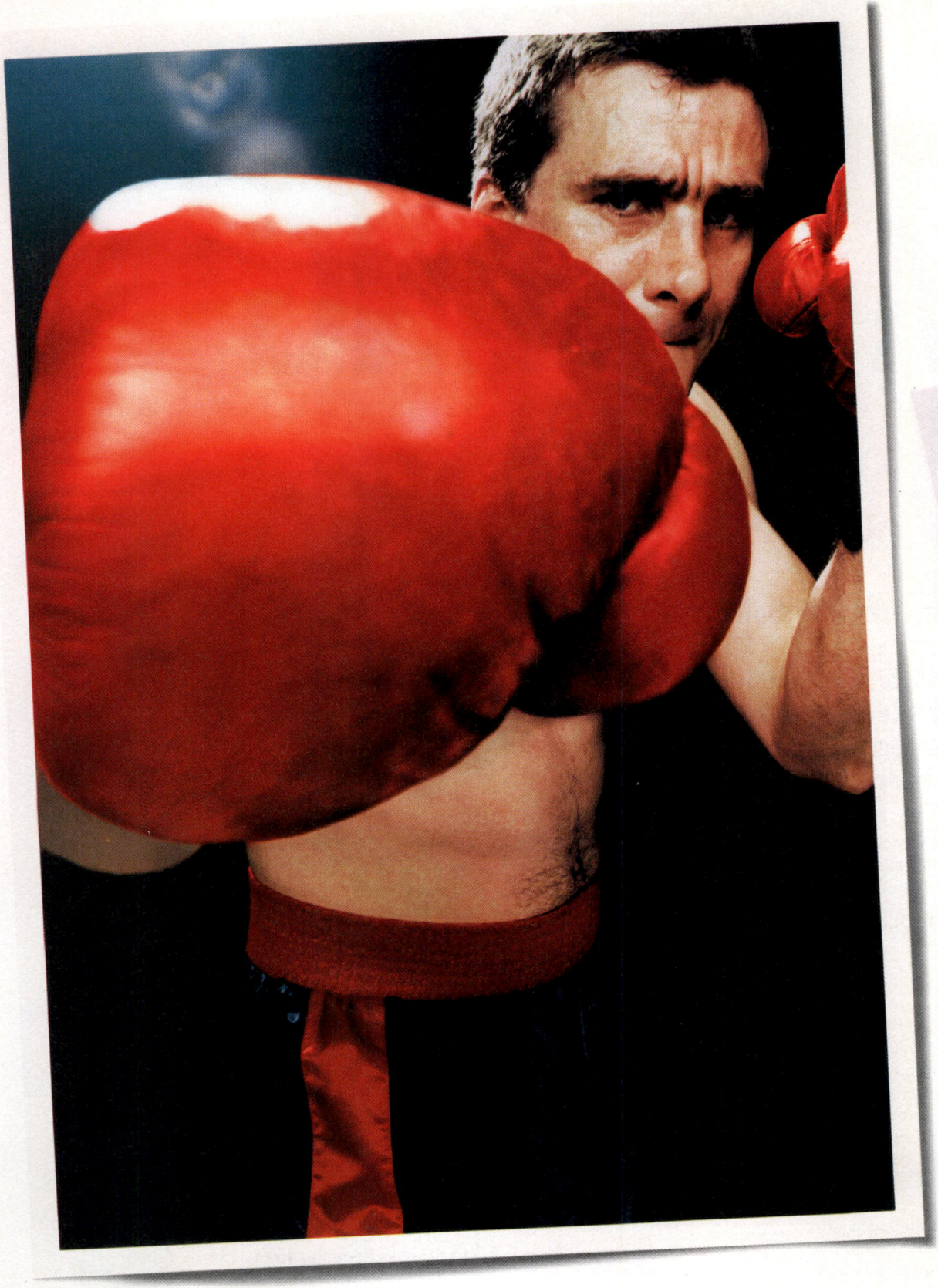

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I'M FEELING LUCKY

Sergey Brin, president and co-founder of Google

The American search engine Google has caused a stir in the UK. Despite miniscule press coverage, it's built a loyal following through word of mouth thanks to the speed and accuracy of its results. Bill Thompson talks to the company's president and co-founder

When the Web was young and freshly minted, back in 1995, the few hundred thousand people who had access to the Internet from work or school were already wrestling with the problem of how to find the information they wanted.

There were around 100,000 Web sites in 1995. On 15 December, news started to spread over email and via the 'What's New' section on Mosaic that Digital had opened its search engine for business. AltaVista was an instant success and rapidly replaced Lycos and Infoseek as the main search engine of dedicated browsers.

Few sites have created such a stir since, because the Web has grown so much, with a huge number and variety of browsers. A site or service now gets only occasional press coverage and has to build a user base by word of mouth. Strategic deals are put in place so the site appears on other people's portals, then everyone seems to be using it.

Google has followed this model closely, having been developed over the past four years by two US mathematicians who turned their work in statistics and data mining into a real product. Google (**www.google.com**) went from beta to full release in September 1999. In November it signed a deal with Virgin Net (**www.virgin.net**), its first in the UK, and is now the core search tool for the ISP's 150,000 users.

Google is now getting on with its mission to take over the search engine space from the feature-rich, bloated and increasingly cluttered first generation services. The co-founder and president of Google, Sergey Brin, is on leave from Stanford University, where he is studying for a PhD in computer science. He has also received a fellowship from the National Science Foundation in the US.

"Our search engine rivals are more concerned about merging with Disney or Westinghouse."

Where did the Google search engine come from?

More than four years ago, Larry Page (co-founder of Google) started downloading from the Web at Stanford, just for fun, and to see what could be done with it. I was doing research in data mining at the time, and I said 'That's great data – let's work on that'. We ended up studying the data of the entire Web. We asked questions like 'What can you learn from the data?' 'What can you mine from it?' It turned out that by mining the entire Web, you can do a much better job of searching.

What makes Google so good?

The key is to take advantage of the content you're searching – this lets you do a much better job.

How do you update the results?

There are two different methods. One is query dependent and the other is query independent. The query independent part is where we can afford to do more computation, because we can do it once for every update to our index, rather than once for every query. We compute the relative importance of every Web page.

You also look at links...

What we look at is who links to

Photography by Frank Rodgers

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who. Just counting links to a page doesn't work well at all. It's important to find out who links to a page and how important they are.

And you've transcribed these into a mathematical equation...
There's a large mathematical analysis in which the entire link structure of the Web gets transcribed into a huge equation. Last time we did it was with an equation of 400 million unknown variables, which showed the ranks of all the pages and three billion terms.

What comes out when you solve that equation?
What we get is a number for every Web page, and that's the query independent component of our ranking. Then we have the query dependent part. When Google analyses a Web page it looks at all the content on the page. It differentiates between things like headings and different font sizes, so it's designed to work with hypertext and where the text is located. Google also looks at the text of nearby pages on the Web, which really gives you an added sense of what the pages are about.

Google was founded in 1998 to build on your work – how big is the company now?
Our company has around 60 people – close to 40 of these are in engineering and research, and over a dozen have PhDs. We have a small, separate research group of three people, but it's growing and doing long term research. This is something we take very seriously. There's a lot of room for growth in searching technology.

Is that because existing search engines are failing?
The existing search engines are great at letting you find information in seconds. But it can be improved, as Google does it, and there's huge headroom in this technology to do an even better job in the years to come.

What would a 'better job' be?
Let me start with where Google is today. Instead of applying traditional data retrieval techniques, which were designed to work on small collections of similar documents, Google was designed to work with the Web, which means analysing hypertext, where there are different kinds of document, such as spam. I think it does a good job of dealing with that.

Can you give an example?
When you search for something obscure, Google gets the right answer because it uses more information to figure out the results. And when you search for broad subjects it still gives you the right results. It'll give you a company home page if you search for a company.

Can search engines cope with the size of the Web?
I think search engines need to get a lot smarter about looking at the meaning of your search terms,. When you say 'I need to ship something from London to the US', a search engine should be able to find things like shipping companies and air-freight. As a browser, you don't know the exact terminology that search engines are using and you might not be able to think of the right thing to type. I think search engines can still come up with them.

What would be the perfect search engine?
The perfect search engine would have superhuman intelligence. At least human intelligence and complete knowledge of all information, but that's many years away.

You've deliberately made Google's home page simple. Why did you avoid portal content?
When people come to Google, all they want to do is search. And that's our product. That's all we do. Being efficient about the search includes all aspects of the user interface, including how long it takes you to find the search box and type your terms.

and that's what our partner companies, such as Virgin, do well.

So you just provide your partners with a back-end search engine?
That's half our business. The other half is the Google.com site, which is where people go when they just want to search and nothing else.

How can you index dynamic content (which is seen as a serious problem)?
That's an interesting area. That's the missing piece right now. We're addressing it in a way because we gain information from nearby pages on the Web, so we can sort of point you at the right resource.

"Searching can be improved in less time than it'll take people to rewrite and speak Esperanto – or XML, which is far worse."

You've been critical of portals like Excite and Yahoo! Why?
If you compare using Google to going to the Excite home page and trying to find the search box you'll see the difference. We work hard to make Google work fast – it returns results in something like 0.2 seconds for most searches. Compared to this, the time it takes you to find the search box is significant. There's valuable information which you can put on portals, which aggregate information,

Is it a problem?
There are lots of good databases out there, such as WhitePages.com [the people finder]. If you're looking for a person, but they haven't got much content about them on the Web, you can still find their phone number and address. You definitely want to be able to incorporate this kind

of data source easily, but it's not clear how to do that. It's a social problem as much as a technology problem – how can you get people to do that? Balancing motivations properly would help – if you're pointing people at their site more often, it's a good thing for them.

"The early entrants have now diversified to the point where their core business is no longer searching."

How will XML change the way you index and search sites?
There's the company perspective and my personal perspective on this one. I think XML is evil because it's anti-technology. A good technology reduces the amount of work people need to do, it improves something in the world – it makes it better and it doesn't have significant negative consequences. The technology should serve the people. The people shouldn't be serving the technology. The problem with XML, which is shared by a lot of modern operating systems, is you do have to serve the technology. Your computer doesn't understand what you write too well . So the solution is to put it all into XML, which I think is outrageous.

So what's the answer?
Natural language has evolved to be an efficient way of communicating complex ideas. The downside is computers don't understand it too well, but I think that's a problem for computers. It's outrageous to expect millions of content authors to do all this extra work in XML. Even if some of it's done by the software, they still have to sort out things like addresses. That's my objection.

Won't understanding the logical structure of documents help?
XML doesn't solve a lot of problems. For instance, it doesn't solve the problem of which Web sites search engines trust. It doesn't solve the problem of what to do about completely new areas or things that people haven't bothered to convert to XML. People search for some obscure things. I don't think those problems go away. The technology of search engines can be improved in less time than it'll take people to rewrite and speak Esperanto – or XML, which is far worse.

So what's the official Google view on XML?
Right now there's not really any significant amount of XML on the Web, so there's no point supporting it – but we will when it takes off. As PDF has become more popular, we've started to support the format. PDF content is important and we're not going to miss out on it. I don't think that'll be the case for XML.

How many pages do you index?
The current index serves results of over 250 million pages. Of those, about 130 million are fully text indexed and we know about the other pages because we have information about their neighbourhood.

What proportion of the Web is that?
I think it's probably zero per cent! Don't forget that there are lots of infinite sites. People have things like their calendar online, with one Web page for every day of the year. It's a complex number to count.

How many Web sites are there?
A study from NEC put the total at 800 million pages, which was done by sampling IP addresses. It's hard to say exactly what this number means. It's better to be bigger, as long as you're able to rank things properly. And it's a good thing to know you've done a comprehensive search. It's something we aim to increase.

What spider do you use?
We have all our own software to do this. These days we can crawl as much as a thousand pages per second. There are various constraints – some sites aren't always happy to be crawled at a thousand pages per second. There are various constraints in terms of how we intersperse accesses between sites and there are all kinds of challenges there.

What else do you do?
As well as the spider, there's index building, searching the index and searching itself. Most of the computing power is used for the latter. In total we use around 2400 computers. It's a large-scale operation. We use PCs, commodity parts and everything runs on top of Linux.

Why do you use Linux?
It's cost effective and it gives us a huge amount of power. We pull in a lot more computation power per search than other sites. We're able to achieve that by using this cheaper platform. To a certain extent, our search engine rivals are more concerned about whether they're going to merge with Disney or Westinghouse. They're not really search engines for the most part. Searching is a small component of a company whose focus is much broader.

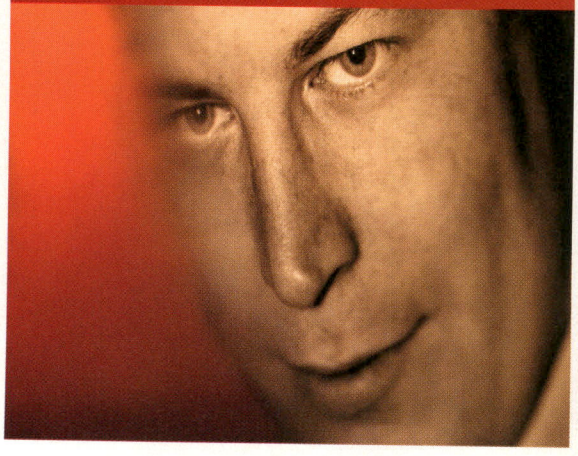
Is that your unique selling point?
We specialise in searching and we do it well. The early entrants have now diversified to the point where their core business is no longer searching, so they can't expect to be as good at searching as they used to be.

Teaming up with Virgin Net

According to Alex Dale, publisher of Virgin Net: "The attraction of Google to us, and vice versa, is it can slot in as a best of breed application. We like the clean design – it's an uncluttered page, so it's quick at finding the information or service you want. It's a good fit. We gave Google 18,000 URLs that were UK sites, but none of them had .co.uk in the URL, which is quite a lot.

"Google is easily the best search engine compared to the likes of Autonomy, Lycos, Excite and Muscat. It's the one search engine that closely fits what we're trying to do commercially and in terms of branding. The fact that Google is a focused search service and not a portal is important.

"As sites get more specialised, you won't get the quality and depth in one site as you would have got a year or two ago. We're specialising at Virgin Net – we spend most of our time developing services that are entertainment and leisure orientated, as opposed to news, health and education. Part of that is to provide a gateway to the rest of the Internet, whether it's entertainment and leisure or broader subjects – Google helps us to do that."



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(fig.1-4) alternative uses for cd

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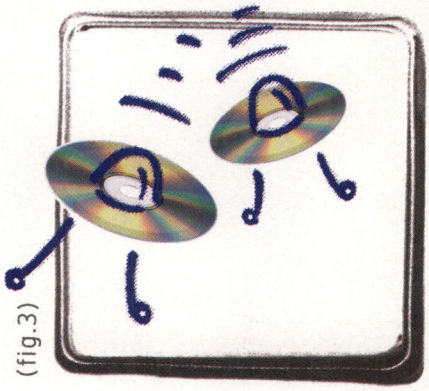
(fig.1)

(fig.2)



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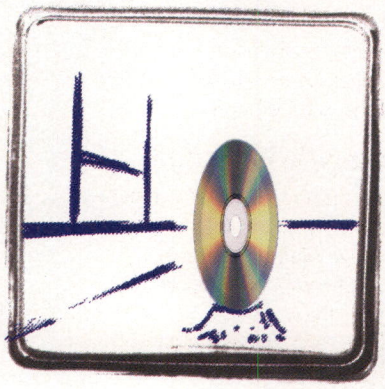

(fig.4)

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High (tech) society

The Internet presents new challenges and raises problems for society and business alike. Andrew Starling predicts what's waiting around the corner

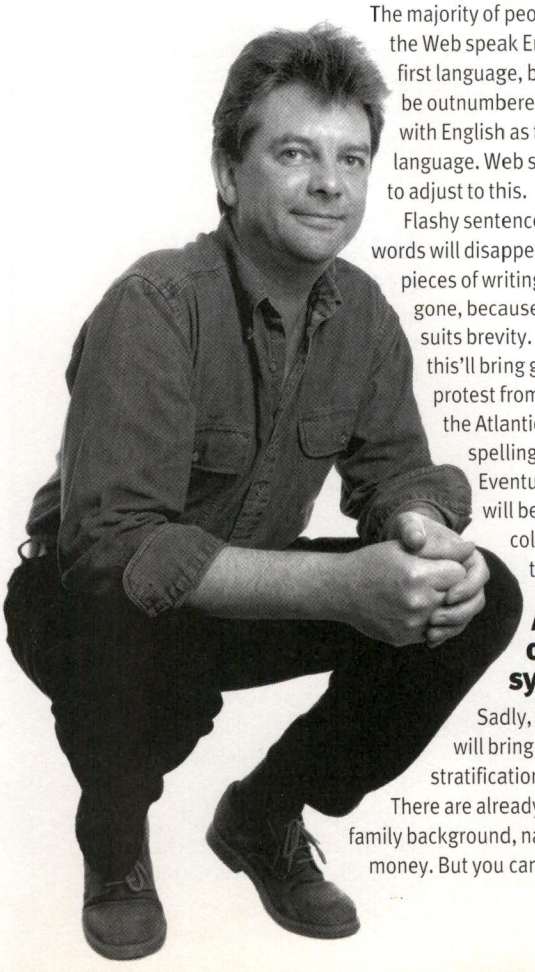
The thing that interests me most about the Internet is how it's going to influence society. I think it's going to have as much impact on our lives as cars and television. Here's how.

Electronic money

We've seen it in science fiction films – Harrison Ford or Bruce Willis being charged 'credits' for a transaction. But think about what you can already do on the Internet. You can use the numbers on your credit card to buy things (without using the physical card itself) and use your Internet bank account to pay your credit card bill. No physical representation of money is involved. We've already reached the future – we just haven't noticed it yet.

A change in language

It's clear that the Internet will promote English as the language of the world. But the strange thing is, it'll also change it.



The majority of people who use the Web speak English as their first language, but they'll soon be outnumbered by people with English as their second language. Web sites will have to adjust to this.

Flashy sentences and long words will disappear. Large pieces of writing have already gone, because the Internet suits brevity. And while this'll bring groans of protest from this side of the Atlantic, British spellings will also go. Eventually, everyone will be spelling tire, color and center the same way.

A new class system

Sadly, the Internet will bring an extra stratification for society. There are already divisions by family background, nationality and money. But you can now add a new class system, based on information – your Internet access. In developed countries, Internet penetration is likely to slow down when it reaches around 50 per cent of the population.

If you've got Net access, you'll be in a strong position, particularly when it comes to business. If you're in the Internet industry you'll likely to do particularly well. But the position of people without Internet access will be weak, and that's 96 per cent of the world's population. In the long term, the Net might improve equality between people, but in the short term it's going to make it worse.

"Internet retailers will finish up running an almost free distribution service for all online consumers."

Shopping

Software, books, CDs, holidays and shares are all selling well on the Internet in the UK. Most of this stuff is either small enough to fit through your letterbox or down the wire, but online shoppers in the US have found that large items, such as cars and houses, also sell well on the Net.

Our shopping habits are destined for the biggest change since the arrival of supermarkets and out of town shopping centres. All kinds of middlemen and middlewomen – from estate agents to bookshop assistants – will face redundancy and be replaced by keyboards and screens.

The positive side, apart from the decline of estate agents, is prices will reduce dramatically. Competition will be so fierce that Internet retailers will find it hard to make a profit. They'll finish up running an almost free distribution service for all online consumers.

Decline in traditional media

Most people don't have time to absorb information from every area of the media, so, as the Internet grows, some section of the media has to take up less of your time. I see newspapers and magazines suffering the most from this – particularly with breaking news – and TV to a lesser extent. Fiction books and radio should either benefit or stay as they are. My rationale is that people want different things from books and radio, so they're not competitive, but you can now get a good range of free newspaper content online .

Information overload

In the past, the ability to dig out sparse information has been a useful skill. But we're starting to live in a world where information is easily available, sometimes too easily. A useful skill for the future will be the ability to survive the information overload and pick the valuable grains of wheat out of the IT chaff. This is a different way of thinking.

Online communities

Poetry is a fine example of something that's been given new life by the Internet. You'll struggle to publish poems commercially in books, but the Internet's free and ideally suited to pieces of short text. It's likely that if you join an Internet community of poets, your work will be spread around the world.

You might not be interested in poetry, but this is just one example of the international Internet communities that are appearing for specialist interests. The next generation will join these world communities without a second thought, which is healthy for world stability.

And this is my last piece as technology editor of *Internet Magazine*. I'm rejoining the fully electronic world to become the webmaster of a large international site. If you want to add to my comments about the Internet and society, or tell me I'm wrong, you can contact me at **astarling@foxglove.co.uk**, or send your views to **feedback@internet.emap.com**.

mailbox

Email us and have your say feedback@internet.emap.com

DACS advice from Sparrowhawk

I changed my ISP to BT Internet five months ago to take advantage of the free weekend connection. I've had no problems at all with the service. My weekday and weekend connection speeds have been extremely good and, in the last five months, my computer has never failed to connect.

Last weekend, for the first time, I decided to play Unreal Tournament over the Internet using BT's 0800 number. The frame rates, ping times and gameplay were fine. I didn't experience any problems at all – I spent six hours playing the game for free. As I only have a 200MMX, 64Mb machine, I was more than pleased with the results.

It makes me wonder if the people that are having problems with BT Internet are on a shared phone line. I had a second line installed into my home for Internet use. I told BT that I wanted a dedicated second line rather than a DACS splitter. It would be interesting to know how many of the people that are experiencing problems have a DACS splitter on their line.

Graham Mee
graham.mee@btinternet.com

PS. If you have Unreal Tournament and you want to take it out on me for this observation, I aim to play most weekends with the character name of Sparrowhawk.

Beware multiple connections

I read you ISP feature (December 1999) with great interest. I already have two ISP connections on my PC and I was thinking about getting another connection. Armed with your advice, I thought I'd have no problem getting set up. But boy was I wrong.

It's not *Internet Magazine*'s fault – your advice was spot on. The ISP's installation CD was woefully out of date and had a lot of bad information on it. But I persevered and I was able to work my way through these minor problems.

I eventually chose ClaraNet, as I liked its offer of 35 hours online for only £14.99. Here's where the real problems started. I followed ClaraNet's instructions to the letter. Everything was installed and I checked everything in the DUN, and the server connections all seemed well. Then it started to stop me accessing my email. Aargh!

I contacted the helpline, which was helpful and offered lots of advice, but the staff couldn't figure out what was wrong. Eventually I uninstalled all mentions of Claranet from my PC, and then put it all back on again. Finally, everything started to work again OK.

Multiple connections are fine, but be prepared for problems. Make sure the helpline has a local call number, and make sure the people at the other end know what they're talking about. I can't fault ClaraNet's technical support, but ISPs really need to sort out their installation CDs.

Gary Gray
gary.gray@bigfoot.com

Support for unmetered calls

Just a short letter to say how I completely agree with the opinion piece in your January 2000 issue. I only hope, like yourself, that the end is in sight. BT really needs to get this one sorted before the government is, in time, forced to act with more force.

Ken Edgar
ken.edgar@acordis.com

Unmetered calls aren't the answer

In response to your opinion piece last month, I don't think unmetered local calls are the answer, as long as BT still owns the vast majority of the phone network. I can see its response to unmetered calls being to increase the rental charges as much as it can get away with. And this price rise will hit casual browsers and non-Internet users hardest.

Businesses should also be ready to pay the costs. I'm sure many of them are already prepared to pay the cost of mobile phone calls. Internet access costs are trivial by comparison.

Until we can be sure that nobody suffers as a result of free local calls, I think 1p a minute is

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Alf Garnett would have been proud

I was disappointed by the article *How to stay safe from viruses* (January 2000). A few items of genuine good advice were hidden in a stream of asocial, xenophobic advice of which Alf Garnett would be proud, but it was unfortunately typical of the head-in-the-sand stance of many security 'experts'.

If the article had been on human viruses, the advice would have been to 'never have sex' or 'travel to countries where people have dark skin', instead of something useful, like 'always wear a condom' or 'only drink bottled water and check the seal'.

The article had a remarkable anti-Microsoft stance – which was unhelpful to around 90 per cent of browsers that use its software – and wanted us to avoid any active Web content or useful document formats. Why is digital signing for ActiveX "the computer equivalent of Russian Roulette", but the use of PGP signing on zip files "one of the best methods..."? Both of these techniques only tell you who wrote the program – you have to choose whether to them to trust them or not. Is the advice to "Use a browser which doesn't support Java or ActiveX" compatible with the rest of *Internet Magazine*'s message?

Finally, why was there no URL or contact details for eSafe, the one product the article did endorse? I had to guess, which wasn't ideal.

The idea for the article was a good one, but please can we have one that's written by someone who lives in the real world of Microsoft software, active content and word-processed documents?

Andrew Johnston
Andrewj@andrewj.com

Tanya Kreisky replies: Everyone needs to decide what level of safety they want online. Your point on common sense advice is a good one. But this article went a step further to tell you how to be certain to avoid viruses. For some people, the loss of active content is a small price to pay. Apologies about the missing URL – it's www.esafe.com.

Our star letter wins a £75 Amazon voucher to spend at the site.
Amazon is the UK's favourite Net bookstore with over 1.5 million titles, but it's easier than shopping on the high street. You can search for books by author, title, subject or keyword. You can also buy gift certificates and send gift-wrapped books. Check out the bestsellers and stay up to date on all the hottest titles. You can also save up to 40 per cent on some titles.
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acceptable. For many people, the Internet is just entertainment and the costs should be considered in context. Where else can you get an hour's worth of entertainment for 60p. It's not even half a pint of beer.

Getting rid of the minimum call charge would be a step forward. Why pay 5p to get your email when you've only used something like 0.5p's worth of call time. You should also be wary of cherry picking the American system – it also has a downside.

Paul Foster
Paul.Foster@avi.com

Tanya Kreisky replies: Now that BT has conceded that unmetered calls are a possibility, the price must be reduced to a reasonable level. The model is in place, it just needs more work. Remember, Paul, that these costs aren't trivial to a lot of people, and Net access can often cost more than 1p a minute. You should be able to go online whenever you want, and for as long as you want, without having to worry about the costs involved.

Browser is ruining my life

I've been in the Web development business for over two years now, and I've always paid great attention to cross-browser compatibility issues. As we all know, a site must be available to the largest audience and therefore as many browsers as possible.

Things are getting better, as version 3 browsers are slowly becoming a thing of the past, but there's a constant thorn in the side of all designer and developers called Netscape Navigator. There, I said it. This browser has caused me endless frustration throughout my time as a Web developer.

Time and time again, wonderful designs created in Dreamweaver are being cruelly mangled by this god-awful software monstrosity, while a leading rival continues to display pages as they were meant to be viewed.

The non-compatibility of dynamic HTML and CSS implementation between browsers can be blamed on the fact that there's still no cross-browser standard. But basic HTML formatting in Netscape is appalling. Netscape seriously needs to pull its finger out to produce a better product for users and developers alike if they want to stop the Microsoft onslaught, which I'm sure it would like to.

For the ordinary browser, and certainly for Windows 4 users, it's slow to load and use. And for the developer, it means simplifying your designs and limiting your ideas. I don't want to see Netscape out of the market forever, but if it means a standard that we can all work to and browse with, I'd take IE4 every time.

Developers must push Netscape for a better product, and magazines must stop championing Netscape as a decent product, because next to Internet Explorer it's way off the pace.

Alastair Mack
alastair@spyd.co.uk

Vive la revolution

In response to your opinion article on unmetered Internet calls, I'd like to add my support.

I'm a retired person who uses a lot of time designing and maintaining Web sites for charitable organisations and I find the time I spend online expensive. I'm happy to pay my ISP for good access to the Internet, but I think the profit BT's making from the line charge is obscene.

Roll on the Revolution.

Clive Watts
Clive@megawatt.demon.co.uk

opinion

Paying the piper

The time has come to decide whether we want free ISP access or free phone calls to the Net. Tanya Kreisky explains why it's impractical and unreasonable to expect both

"BT will string this one out as long as possible. A lot of those massive profits are thanks to local calls."

The debate surrounding unmetered calls to the Net has caused many readers to write in this month

Stuck in a webjam?
Land on the right orbit.

web hosting from £19.95.
UNIX or NT.

9Net Standard Features

- Multiple OC-3's to UUnet, MCI & GTE Int'l • Powered by SGI origin 2000 server
- Your own FTP site • Your own CGI directory • 7500 Series Cisco Router
- POP 3 accounts • Account "Control Panel" access via WWW
- Daily Tape Backup of your data • Expert technical support • On-site UPS
- 24-hour on-site monitoring • Same day set-up • No minimum contract
- Excite Search Engine • **99% uptime & 90 day money-back guarantee**

9Net ONE Plan £19.95/month

- 25 MB of disc space • 10 POP3 mailboxes • 1500 MB of monthly data transfer, £.05p over • CGI library (counters, mailto forms, etc.) • SSI PGP ASP MIME Support
- Dedicated Real audio/video server • Detailed Web Usage Statistics
- Access to raw log files

9Net PRO plan £49.95/month (Reseller Plan)

- 100 MB of disc space • 25 POP3 mailboxes • ALL features of 9 Net One Plan Plus:
- Dedicated secure server (SSL) • Cybercash and VeriSign support
- Full ODBC support • MS SQL, MS Access, mSQL • Shopping Cart
- 5000 MB of monthly data transfer, £.05p over
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www.9netavenue.co.uk
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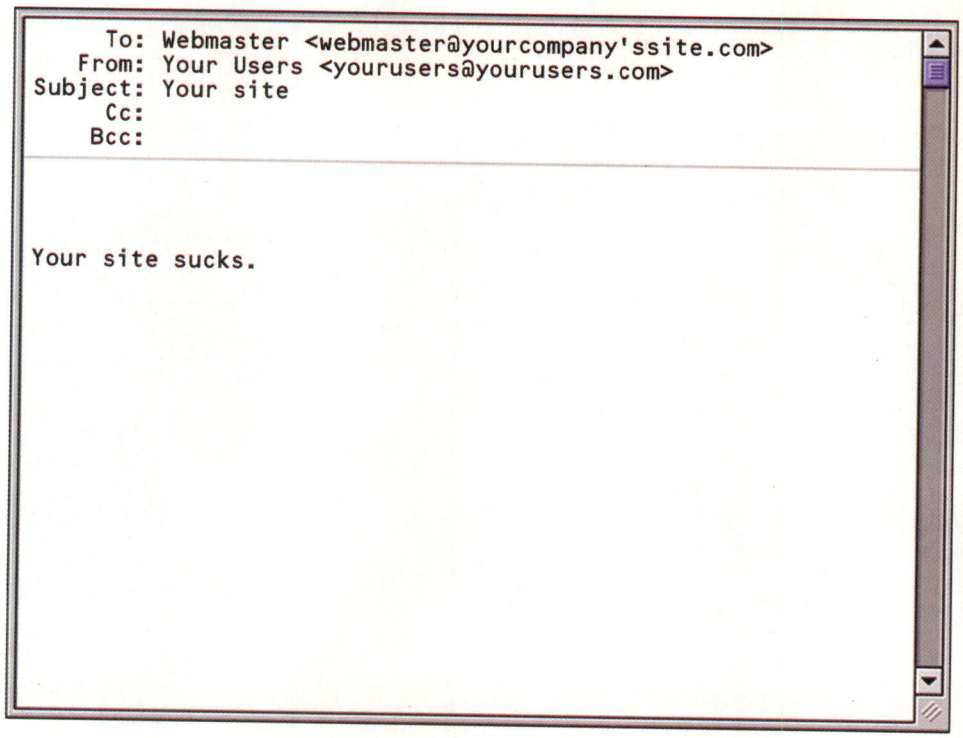

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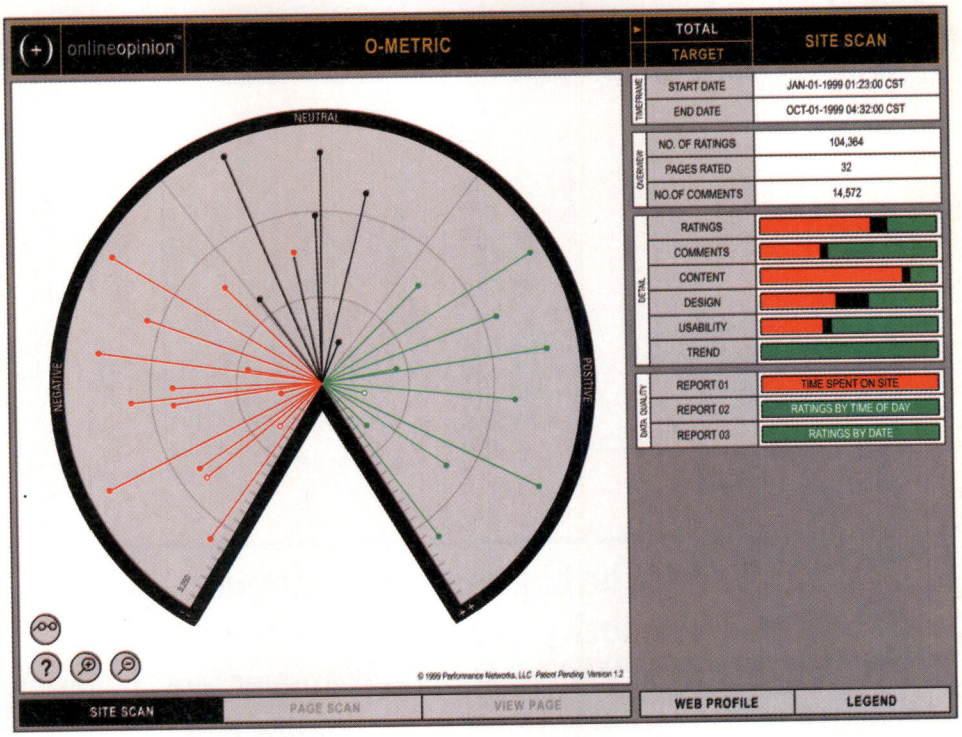

so is this

www.o-pinion.com

If you're responsible for your company's Website, you're probably wondering, "What do I do next?" Traditional feedback mechanisms can't supply the data needed to make informed decisions about a site's design, content and functionality. You need feedback from your most valuable source – the people who visit your site every day. OnlineOpinion,™ a Web-wide feedback convention, delivers actionable, page-specific user opinion data through a unique online reporting system. In a few short minutes you can download and install OnlineOpinion and start gathering user ratings and comments. Visit our site today for a demonstration, free download and subscription details. The longer you wait, the less you know.

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POWER UP YOUR SITE

You want your site to be big, beautiful, safe and fast. You want it to knock your visitors' socks off. But without the right Web host, it might never live up to its potential. Richard Baguley explains the hosting choices and tells you how to make sure you get the right service at the right price

Whatever kind of Web site you have, or plan to build, there are plenty of places to put it, ranging from the free space that your ISP offers to a dedicated server hosted by a professional hosting company. Every one of these options has its own restrictions and potential pitfalls, so it pays to make sure that you understand what you should be getting for your money and that the service you choose suits the needs of your site.

Every company that provides Web hosting services will do its best to convince you that it is the one for you, so you should take some time to look around and work out which one is really the perfect fit. It's also a fiercely competitive market, so there are plenty of good deals available, although you should remember that you're about to make a long-term commitment. »

pic: Allsport

The services on offer

Some of the hosting packages on offer, and their strengths and weaknesses

Web host	Service name	URL	Cost (per year)*	Setup cost*	Type	Typical URL
Freeserve	Freeserve	www.freeserve.co.uk	Free	Free	Web space	www.your-name.freeserve.co.uk
FreeNetName	FreeNetName	www.freenetname.co.uk	Free	Free	Web space & domain	www.your-name.co.uk
Global Internet	iLink Light (Unix)	www.global.net.uk	£179	Free	Web space & domain	www.your-name.com
EasySpace	Easyspace	www.easyspace.co.uk	£71.88	Free	Shared server	www.your-name.co.uk *or* .com
FreeServers	Freeserservers.com	www.freeservers.com	Free	Free	Shared server	www.your-name.freeservers.com
Rapidsite	Professional Plan	www.rapidsite.co.uk	£274.45	£19.95	Shared server	www.your-name.com
Planet Online	Planet NT Web server	www.theplanet.net	£11,400	£850	Dedicated server	www.your-name.com
Planet Online	Co-located server	www.theplanet.net	£8,400	£850	Dedicated server	www.your-name.com
Own server	N/A	N/A	Varies	Varies	Dedicated server	www.your-name.com

Married to the host

Finding a host for your Web site is like getting married: it pays to know who you are committing to, because changing your mind afterwards could get messy and expensive. Ideally, you want a host that will be good not only for your site as it is now, but also for what it might be in the future. You might decide to buy yourself a domain name, or start selling things from your site, but if the host that you chose can't or won't do these things, then you'll have to move the site, which is never easy.

For instance, you might initially be tempted to use the free Web space that a free ISP such as Freeserve (**www.freeserve.net**) provides you with, but this has numerous limitations. If some time down the line you decide to register your own domain name and use it on your site, you'll have to move the site, because Freeserve only lets you use the domain name it gives you with your Web space.

Even the free services that do let you register a domain name have limitations. If you use the Freenetname (**www.freenetname.co.uk**) service to register a domain name, you have to dial into its service to pick up your email or edit your site - you can't access the service from another ISP. This also means that you can't pick up your mail from abroad without making an expensive international call. Plus, if you decide that you want to move your domain elsewhere, you'll have to pay a fee of £94 to Freenetname, plus any fees that the new host charges.

You should also be aware that many companies that provide a free or cheap service have restrictions about how you can use this service. In particular, some won't allow you to use the space for commercial purposes because they would rather you used their more expensive business services. This isn't always the case, though – several ISPs let you use the space for whatever you want (as long as it's not pornographic or illegal), so make sure you check out usage terms before you open up a Widget shop in Web space that can't be used for business purposes.

It's also worth remembering that just because someone has designed your site for you, you don't have to host it with them. Many design companies will offer Web hosting as an additional service or part of their design package, but you don't have to use this – the pages can be hosted anywhere you want.

The pros and cons

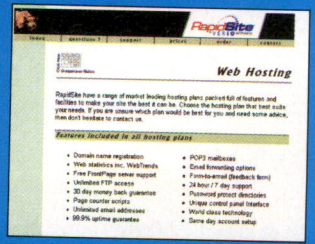
There are several different types of services on offer, so here are some of the pros and cons of each. The table above gives some examples of specific services. We've grouped the options by price and setup, but remember that each individual service could have slightly different options. Once we've helped you decide how much you need to spend, you'll need to call your prospective hosting services or visit their sites to check out the small print.

Find out more

Before placing your site with a host, do a bit of online research so you know what to expect. And if you're thinking of hosting your site in the US, CNet provides a Web site where you can select the features you want from a host and it will come back with a list of companies that fit the bill (at http://webhostlist.internetlist.com)

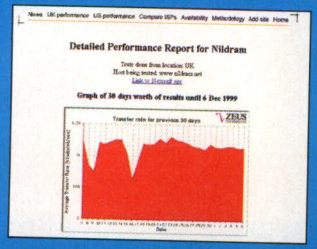
RapidSite

Every host will supply you with a list of the options that its service provides. Make sure you read and understand this. Here's RapidSite's feature list as an example (**www.rapidsite.co.uk**)



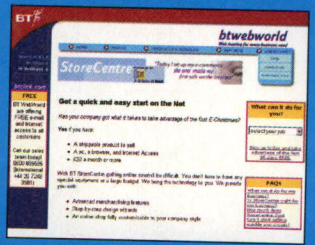
Zeus

The test of Web hosts carried out by Zeus technologies (featured on page 145) provide a good indication of how various Web hosting companies are performing (at **www.zeustechnology.com**)



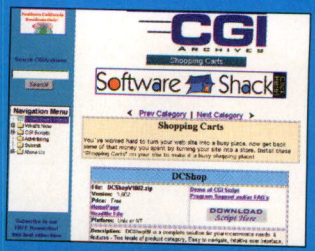
BTstore

Many hosting companies offer services that let you sell things over the Web. This example is BT's StoreCentre (at **www.btwebworld.com**)



CGI

if you are feeling brave (and your ISP allows it), you can download and run your own e-commerce systems from CGI archives (at **www.cgicentral.com**)



All details refer to the standard package offered by the hosting company. Other companies may offer slightly different packages : check the details before signing up
* Does not include any dial-up charges to access the Internet or Web space
**Some of the companies mentioned offer domain names as an additional service: this column refers to the named product

Domain name**	Business use	Disk space (Mb)	Max bandwith	CGI scripts supplied	Run own CGI scripts	Logfiles	Traffic statistics	SSL secure server	E-commerce facilities	MS Frontpage support	POP E-mail
✗	✓	15	No limit	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
✓	✓	20	10,000 hits per day	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
✓	✓	20	10,000 hits per day	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
✓	✓	100	No Limit	✓	✗	Y	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
✗	✓	20	No Limit	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
✓	✓	50	4000 Mb per month	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
✓	✓	Lots	No Limit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	Lots	No Limit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	Lots	Limited by bandwidth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Free

Web space that comes free with dial-up ISP accounts

This is where an ISP (such as Freeserve, Demon or Global Internet) supplies you with some free Web space as part of the service they offer, either as a free ISP or one that you pay a monthly fee for. This option is obviously cheap, but it does have some serious drawbacks. You get a rather awkward URL, the amount of space you get can be limited and you can't run your own CGI scripts, which are essential to have if you have forms or other software. This might not sound like a problem, but it will limit you if you're thinking of using anything fancy on your pages such as ASP (Active Server Pages) or e-commerce systems like Actinic Catalog. These services won't let you run your own scripts or programs, because they could crash the server and take down not only your Web site, but those of thousands of other customers too.

These services also don't let you use a domain name with your site, and a long URL doesn't look very businesslike. Plus, many ISPs don't allow you to use this space for commercial purposes and include restrictions on the amount of Web traffic that your site can receive. Some could even delete your site if it gets too popular.

TYPICAL URL www.yourisp.co.uk/~yourname
PROS Free
CONS Limited traffic, could feature adverts, could restrict business use, no CGI scripts or e-commerce systems, no domain name

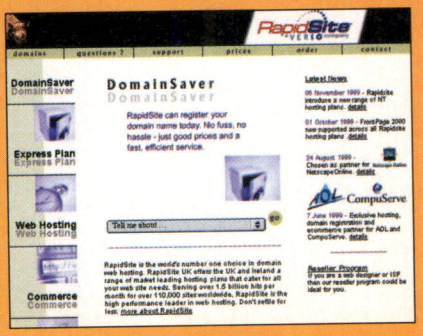
£80-£200 a year

A shared server

In this option, you buy space on a computer that runs as a Web server. Many ISPs offer this as a service (including Demon and UUnet), and there are plenty of companies that specialise in this sort of service, such as EasySpace (www.easyspace.co.uk), Corpex (www.corpex.co.uk)and RapidSite (www.rapidsite.co.uk). This sort of service is much less limited than free Web space, since you can use a domain name with it, you get more Web space and can often run your own scripts. However, you have to remember you are still sharing a server with other customers, so many hosts will restrict the types of scripts you can run or will have to approve them before you use them. But the upside of this is that many hosts will offer a ready built e-commerce service to use with your site, so you can start selling things as soon as you've entered the details of the goods you want to sell. Your host will then handle the credit card ordering (for a fee) and send you the money.

But there is a downside: many hosts will still restrict the amount of traffic your site can receive, and might charge you extra if your site gets too popular. And because you are sharing the server with other Web sites, the performance of the server could suffer (leading to slow page downloads) if the server or connection to the Internet gets overloaded by the other sites on the same server.

Typical URL www.yourname.com
PROS You can use your own domain name, can run some CGI scripts, more space, limited cost
CONS You share a server with other users, limited traffic, some limit CGI scripts



RapidSite is an example of a dedicated hosting service offering a shared server solution

£8,000-10,000 a year

A dedicated server

If you think your site is going to be particularly busy or requires some a more complicated setup, you should get yourself a dedicated server. As the name suggests, this is when you get a computer all to yourself in the host's building. This means that you can do what you want with the computer, and it has a nice fast connection to the Internet because it's located right on their network.

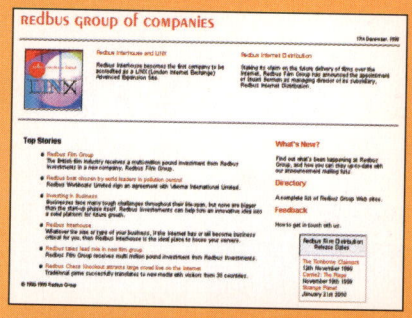
This option is expensive, but there are plenty of benefits. Because the server is yours alone, you can run whatever you want on it, from databases to e-commerce systems and even games servers. The host looks after the hardware, so if it breaks down, it's quickly replaced without you having to worry about it.

The downside is that you have to administer the server. While most hosts will offer some sort of support, what they won't do is run the server for you. This means that if you have problems with the server software or want to install »

Moving your site

Even if you choose the ideal host, it is possible that you will want to move your Web site and domain name at some point in the future. This process can be fiddly, but you can usually get the new host to do most of the work. The first step is to contact your new host (once you've chosen one) and let it know where the site is hosted. Your new host will then contact the old host and ask for control of the domain to be passed over. This is done by updating the DNS records which tell the Web browser where to find the Web site – if these are changed to point to the new server, Web browsers will automatically be redirected to your new site. If you are one of the contacts listed at the domain registrar (such as Network Solutions for a .com name or Nominet for a .co.uk), you'll receive an email asking you to approve the change. Make sure that you answer this immediately, or the process may be halted.

Then all you have to do is to take a copy of your Web site from the old server and put it on the new one. It's usually a good idea to run both side by side for a few days as the DNS changes can take some time to spread through the system. But after this you can delete the old site and tell the old host it's not required any more.



Rebus Interhouse lets you run your own Web server from its offices

a new program, you have to do it. This isn't a problem if you're technically adept, but it's not recommended if you don't understand how these programs work.

TYPICAL URL www.yourname.com

PROS Can handle plenty of hits, you get complete control over the machine, including CGI scripts, e-commerce systems and databases. Plus the hosting company will fix any problems with the machine

CONS Expensive, can be difficult to administer

The DIY approach (price varies)

Running your own server

Many people choose to run their own server in their own offices. This has the same benefits of the dedicated server, but with the added bonus of the machine being accessible if you need to upgrade the hardware. However, the same downside applies – if you have problems, you're on your own. Plus you have to factor in the cost of the connection that people accessing your site will access it through – this can quickly get extremely expensive if your site gets popular. It's also possible to run your own server in the offices of a hosting company (called co-location), where you buy and run the hardware and they provide the connectivity. Several companies offer this, such as Redbus Interhouse (www.interhouse.redbus.co.uk) and Corpex (www.corpex.com). This costs less than a dedicated server, but the downside is that you have to buy and fix the server yourself.

TYPICAL URL www.yourname.com

PROS Complete control – you can do what you want with the server and run whatever you like

CONS You run the server – if it has problems you have to fix them. Bandwidth can also be expensive

E-commerce for all

If you're planning to sell things through your Web site, you should pay special attention to which e-commerce systems your hosting service will let you use. Many restrict the use of e-commerce programs because a badly configured system could crash the server and take down all the other Web sites located on it. Many hosts have systems that they've tested and approved for use on their servers, and many offer a service where you can use an e-commerce system that they run for you. For instance, Corpex (www.corpex.com) recommends (and sells) Actinic Catalog, while WebFusion (www.webfusion.co.uk) offers a service that uses the Miva Merchant system. Meanwhile, Magic Moments (www.magic-moments.com)sells a variety of systems, all of which have been tested and passed fit for use on its servers.

Magic Moments offers a hosting service allied to e-commerce solutions

Foreign hosts welcome here

It is also feasible to host your site in another country and run it from the UK. Hosting it in the US, in particular, can have several advantages. Web hosting in the US tends to be a little cheaper (you can get a domain name and 40Mb of space from $25 – around £17 – a month). Plus the site will be faster if you get a lot of hits from users in the US because it won't have to bounce across the Atlantic. However, you should bear in mind that exchange rates can fluctuate, so the amount you will pay can go up and down. It is also possible that hosting an e-commerce site in the US and selling to US customers could open a very large can of worms in terms of export laws and taxes, so do your homework first.

The five key questions to ask

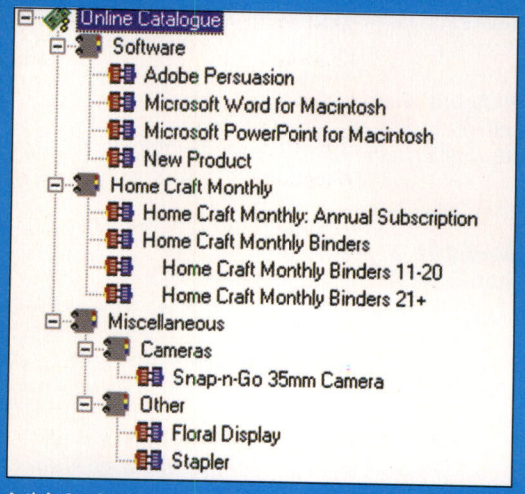
1 Can I use a domain name?
Some hosting services (particularly the cheap and free ones) either won't let you use your own domain name with your Web site, or will charge you extra to do this. Make sure that you understand the consequences and costs of this for if you decide you want one in the future.

2 Can I add e-commerce options to my site?
If your site is for a business, then chances are at some point you'll want to sell things from the site. Check whether this is possible and what the costs are.

3 Can I carry adverts on my site?
If your site proves popular, you'll probably want to put some banner ads on there to generate some revenue. Some hosts won't let you do this or will force you to carry their ads (which you don't get paid for). Make sure you know how this works.

4 Can I move my domain name?
Once you have a domain name to go with your site, some hosts won't let you move this elsewhere if you decide to move the site. Some might charge you an administration fee to do move the name. Make sure you know what the conditions are before you sign up.

5 What are the limitations on the Web space?
Some hosts will put limits on your site, such as only allowing a certain number of hits a month or not allowing commercial use of the Web space. Make sure that you know exactly what these limitations are and that they won't be a problem. Think ahead about this as well – the last thing you want to happen is for your burgeoning online store to be removed, along with your business site, by the host because you broke the rules.



Actinic Catalog is a simple system for selling things over the Internet, but you should check whether your host will let you run it before you buy it

Information is power

Wherever you choose to host your Web site, the important thing is that you understand what you can and can't do with it. Before making the all-important choice of host, work out what you want to do with your site both now and in the future, and asking the right questions (see above). You should always make sure that any hosting service you're considering can answer your questions. If it can't or won't, go elsewhere. Remember – you have a choice.

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Get a love life

From meeting your perfect partner and planning your wedding to sorting out your divorce, you can use the Internet to make or break a relationship. Gail Robinson shows you what's out there if you're online and looking for love

Here's a surprising statistic – 40 per cent of all adults living in Britain are currently single (according to a report done by NOP for the online meeting service Match.com). Well, maybe it's not so surprising. How many conversations have you had recently that start something like this...

Girl mate: "I just can't meet any normal blokes, if they're not married by the time they get to 30 they're either gay or mad."

Or bloke mate: "I don't know where all the single women hide out these days, I can't seem to find any".

The trouble is, we spend so much of our time working that we neglect our social lives. Apparently, 41 per cent of adult Londoners are single, compared to 30 per cent in Scotland. If you're finding your endless quest for career success is leaving you short of time to develop your love life, you might want to accelerate your social life with a bit of help from the Internet. From meeting that perfect person through to planning the wedding and sorting out the divorce, you can do it all online. Be warned though – at some time you'll have to meet face to face, preferably before the wedding day.

Getting a date

Single people aged between 35 and 44 are almost twice as likely to go on a date with somebody they haven't met in the flesh than younger age groups – it's a sign of desperation, I'm sure. Still, if you don't fancy hanging around Stringfellows searching for a soul mate, you could always join one of the numerous online romance and friendship sites.

Match.com (www.match.com) is an old hand at this matchmaking business – more than 30,000 singles register each week, and it's already created 25,000 relationships and 1,600 marriages since its launch in 1995. If you don't want to pay the membership fee straight away, you can give the free seven-day trial a whirl. You create a personal profile and give yourself a nickname. Your profile then joins the list of hopeful singles and you can go ahead and search for matching profiles. If you find somebody you like the look of, you just email them. I was getting a bit depressed four days into my free trial – nobody had responded (this could have been something to do with the Techgirrl nickname I used). But Match says you have to send emails out, not just wait for somebody to pick you.

Pic: Matt Kenyon

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The matching is pretty basic – it's done on physical criteria including the build and height of the person you're looking for and whether you want a smoker and a drinker or not.

You can also give your details to Personals 365 (www.personals365.com). The service is free, and as soon as you get online and state your sex you're told exactly how many members of the opposite sex are currently lurking in the chat and message areas. The service looks like the personal ads in the back of newspapers, with a couple of descriptive sentences and an email or chat link. The live chat facility is a great idea – if you take a fancy to someone, you simply click on the live chat icon to see if they're online and ready to flirt.

There are three areas to the 365 site – Just Talk is for making new friends, Small Talk is for casual fun and dating and Smooth Talk is for those looking for lurrve and commitment. Amazingly, considering their normal aversion to the C word (commitment), there were 41 blokes lurking in the Smooth Talk section when I last visited the site.

If it's live chat you're after, give Liv4now (www.liv4now.com) a go. Membership is free and you can join various chat areas. Try out the Beach chatroom if you fancy a bit of a flirt, or wait until the evening, when it starts to hot up in there. Liv4now is the only UK meeting place that offers offline meeting opportunities. The service recently hosted its first official offline get together in a London club – you can find lots of incriminating photos from the evening on the site.

If you're looking for something a little more adventurous, try A1Romance at www.a1romance.com. It caters for couples searching for other couples, guys for guys, transgenders for transgenders – whatever swings your boat. There are also plenty of run of the mill personal ads. My favourite was the Adventurous Village Inn Keeper – who could resist?

Meanwhile, the MSN chat areas seem to be home to the UK's swinger population. If you want to meet "someone for friendship or fun or maybe more", why not take a look at the MSN English Babes community. There's even a chat area for anyone married that fancies a bit on the side. Check out the Communities section from the MSN home page (www.msn.co.uk) for a full list.

Some online dating dos and don'ts

❤ Do be careful about choosing the right nickname. For instance, I'm sure 'The Impaler', who haunts Match.com, doesn't get a lot of responses.

❤ Don't send out the chat message, "I'm interested in sex, how about you?" This was one of the first messages I received on Personals 365. Most of us are looking for a more subtle approach.

❤ Do put a photo up with your personal ad – apparently it gets you three times as many responses.

❤ Don't put your photo up there if you look like Van Morrison on a bad day.

❤ Do stress your fabulous sense of humour. Research has shown that a good sense of humour is the first thing women and men look for in prospective partners.

❤ Do use sentences, capital letters and check the spelling of any your ad. Just because this is the Internet, you don't have to let your grammar go to pot.

Doing the wooing

Once you've got them hooked, it's time to reel them in with a bit of romance. You can start off by sending a slushy online postcard. 1001 Postcards (www.postcards.org) has a large selection of friendship, love, valentine and even marriage proposal cards to choose from – many of them complete with animations and a soppy soundtrack. It's also worth checking out the e-cards at the Hallmark site at www.hallmark.com. Then it's time to move out of the virtual world with a real-life gift – how about a tasteful Sweetheart bouquet from Interflora (www.interflora.co.uk)?

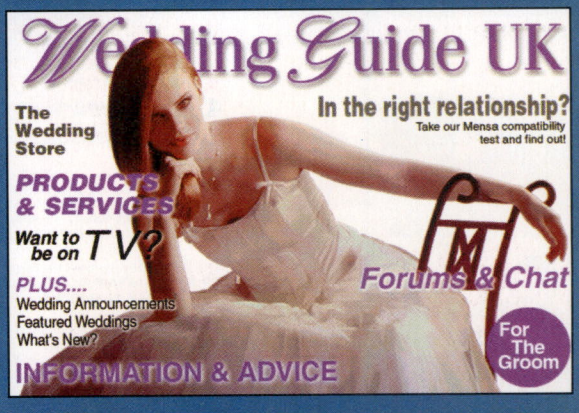
Then there's the all-important first date to think about. You could choose a romantic movie at Filmfinder (www.filmfinder.co.uk). Or perhaps a night out at the theatre is a more stylish option. At What's Onstage (www.whatsonstage.co.uk), you can choose your theatrical genre and see what tickets are available. You'll probably want a bite to eat beforehand, so check out the excellent restaurant search facility at Simply Food (www.simplyfood.co.uk). And for something a bit special, check out Lastminute.com (www.lastminute.com). Here you'll find bookings for the chic restaurants and popular stage shows – guaranteed to really impress your date.

Getting serious

It's all going swimmingly and you're starting to think that this might be the person you want to spend the rest of your life with. But before you get too carried away it's worth putting your relationship to the test online. Type in your name and that of your beloved at the Love Calculator (www.lovecalculator.com) and let the ancient art of numerology decide if you're meant to be together. If you want a more scientific test of the strength of your relationship, try out the MENSA compatibility test at the Wedding Guide site (www.weddingguide.co.uk).

If you pass all those tests, perhaps the time has come to pop the question. There are hoards of sites devoted to helping you plan your wedding day down to the very last detail. Confetti (www.confetti.co.uk) has a mass of free wedding planning tools, including to-do lists, a budget planner and a wardrobe planner. Wedding Guide will scare you to death with the fact that the average cost of getting married in the UK is now £11,000 – the Posh and Becks wedding obviously increased the average somewhat. There's also a special section for the groom, guiding you through your duties, from getting tied to a lamppost naked on the stag night through to making your speech on the day. The comprehensive Wedding Day Guide (www.wedding-day.co.uk) has plenty of links to caterers, car

Put your love to the MENSA compatability test at the Wedding Guide (www.weddingguide.co.uk)



❤ Case study 1

Catarina and Steve met on Personals365 a couple of months ago and are now dating. Catarina is originally from Portugal and had moved to work in PR in Reading. Her job meant having to work long hours at short notice, so she found it tricky to meet people outside her working environment. Meanwhile, Steve had got tied up working long hours in his career as a graphic designer. Neither of them had used personal ads before. Steve hoped he'd have more in common with somebody he'd met online than with somebody he met through a newspaper ad.

Steve's message was about the fifth Catarina received and Steve was intrigued by the response. After three weeks of emailing each other, they decided to meet up. Steve was more worried about Catarina's safety than she was. "I didn't want her to think I was a freak," he says. But Catarina explains: "It was just like meeting a friend for a drink, and we got on and so we met again. Now we're just taking things steady to see where it'll go."

So what advice can Catarina and Steve give to anybody who's thinking about joining an online meeting service? Catarina is all for it. "The Internet isn't a replacement for going out, but if you have 15 minutes to spare at the end of the working day, you can strike up good conversations with people that might lead to a meeting," she says. Steve is equally enthusiastic: "This is great fun for young spirited people who just want a bit of a laugh. I never dreamed I'd actually meet up with anyone, but people just have to accept technology is now part of our lives and can offer individuals new opportunities if they're willing to take them."

"Don't put your photo with your personal ad if you look like Van Morrison on a bad day."

❤ Case study 2

Sally French, 26, read about Liv4now in *The Independent* and thought it sounded interesting, so she checked out the site. She wasn't looking for love but enjoys chatting online. "I've always loved meeting people and sometimes when I can't be bothered to go out, it's nice just to chat to people on the Net from the comfort of my bedroom. As for looking for romance, I don't go looking to find a new boyfriend on the Web any more than someone who pops down to their local bar for a drink."

As it turned out, Sally was constantly bumping into the same guy in the chatroom and she was surprised at how well they got on – it seemed logical that they should meet. The pair got together at a Live4now social. Sally explains: "We got chatting and ended up arranging to meet. If it hadn't worked out, so be it, but it did and we're both just taking it as it comes."

Sally has some sensible advice for those looking for love online. "Don't give out any personal details in the chatrooms. You might think this is common sense, but I've heard about people giving out their address, telephone number and even bank details. I think it's worth trying to find a site that you're comfortable with and where the people online are most like yourself."

hire services and photographers. Weddings.co.uk (www.weddings.co.uk) has a directory of over 2,000 wedding venues (including wedding chapels in Las Vegas) and some handy suggestions for honeymoon locations. You can even put your names forward to appear on TV here – apparently Gaby Roslin is looking for couples to enter a quiz show to win a dream wedding and Trisha is looking for the perfect Millennium bride.

Direct your best man over to the Bachelor Party Tips site (www.bachelorpartytips.com) where you'll find a useful section entitled Stripper Tips. The site advises you to watch out for ugly strippers, apparently "the more remote your location, the uglier they'll probably be." For more refined advice on choosing the venue, plus who to invite, check out The Best Man site at www.thebestman.com. And if you're stuck for inspiration for the speech you'll find thousands of suitable jokes at www.weddingjokes.com. Here's a good one for the girls: Question: What's the fastest way to a man's heart? Answer: Through his chest with a sharp knife. And one for the guys: Wife: I must have been a fool when I married you. Husband: You were dear, but for some reason I was in love and didn't notice it.

If the idea of walking down the aisle is really stressing you out, you could always have a trial run and get married online. Visit www.nadtech.com/wedding.html and walk down the virtual wedding aisle – you even get a certificate at the end of the service. At the Newly Wed Game site at www.spe.sony.com/tv/shows/newlywed/netnuptials, you get to choose your virtual wedding location – I went through a very moving ceremony at the Elvis wedding chapel.

Help! It's all going pear-shaped

With the wedding out of the way, your relationship might start to become a little stale, particularly in the bedroom. You'll find plenty of tips for spicing up your love life at the New Woman site (www.newwomanonline.co.uk). Give the Orgasmatron a whirl – it's full of sizzling sex tips. Or you could email your relationship worries to Dr CyberLove at www.grounder.com/cyber.htm. If you get no joy there, try Dr Love at www.askdrlove.com. According to the blurb on the site, "Dr Jamie Turndorf has helped millions solve their toughest love snags".

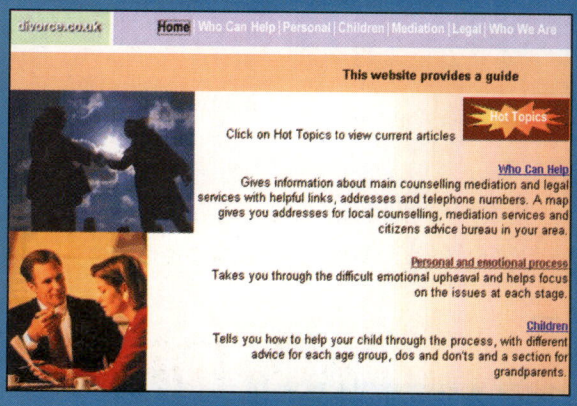
If your relationship's really reached a low point, you could go for some online counselling. The Counseling Connection (www.counseling-connection.com) offers its services via email. Send an email to the therapist of your choice and they'll respond within two days for a mere $1 per minute. The Connection also offers live chat consultations over the Net.

Sometimes the only solution is to split up. If you're too cowardly to do it in person, why not visit the New Woman site again and use the automatic Dear John letter writing facility. All you have to do is answer a few questions about your hopeless relationship and the Dear John letter writer will do the hard work for you. It takes a sensitive approach to your problems, as you can see from this excerpt: "The thing is, you and I have grown apart – you smell like a badger's bottom. Quite frankly, I'd rather sit in worming the cat than spend another evening listening to you droning on."

Getting a divorce through the law courts can be an expensive and time-consuming process, as Mike Carson, the first Briton to officially get divorced over the Internet found out. His divorce had been dragging on for nine years and had cost him a fortune. In desperation, he used an Internet legal service to create his own divorce papers, all for only £60. You can do the same at the Desktop Lawyer (www.desktoplawyer.net). Download all the relevant documents and it'll only set you back £59.99. Of course, you'll have to prove your marriage has irretrievably broken down, and the documents should only be used if the other party is not contesting the divorce.

If you got married in the US, you might be eligible for a 24-hour celebrity divorce – it's known as a celebrity divorce because so many celebs have used the service to get rid of unsuitable spouses quickly. Get the lowdown at www.inc.com/users/divorces.html to see if you qualify for a Dominican, Haitian or Mexican divorce. im

"That fabulous woman you've been chatting up might be an overweight trucker called Wayne."



When it's over, it's over – and time to head for www.divorce.co.uk

Online safety

There are some serious issues to think about if you're going to get involved in online dating. There have been incidents of online stalking and some of the chat in the meeting areas can be saucy to say the least. Take the following precautions to make sure you stay safe online.

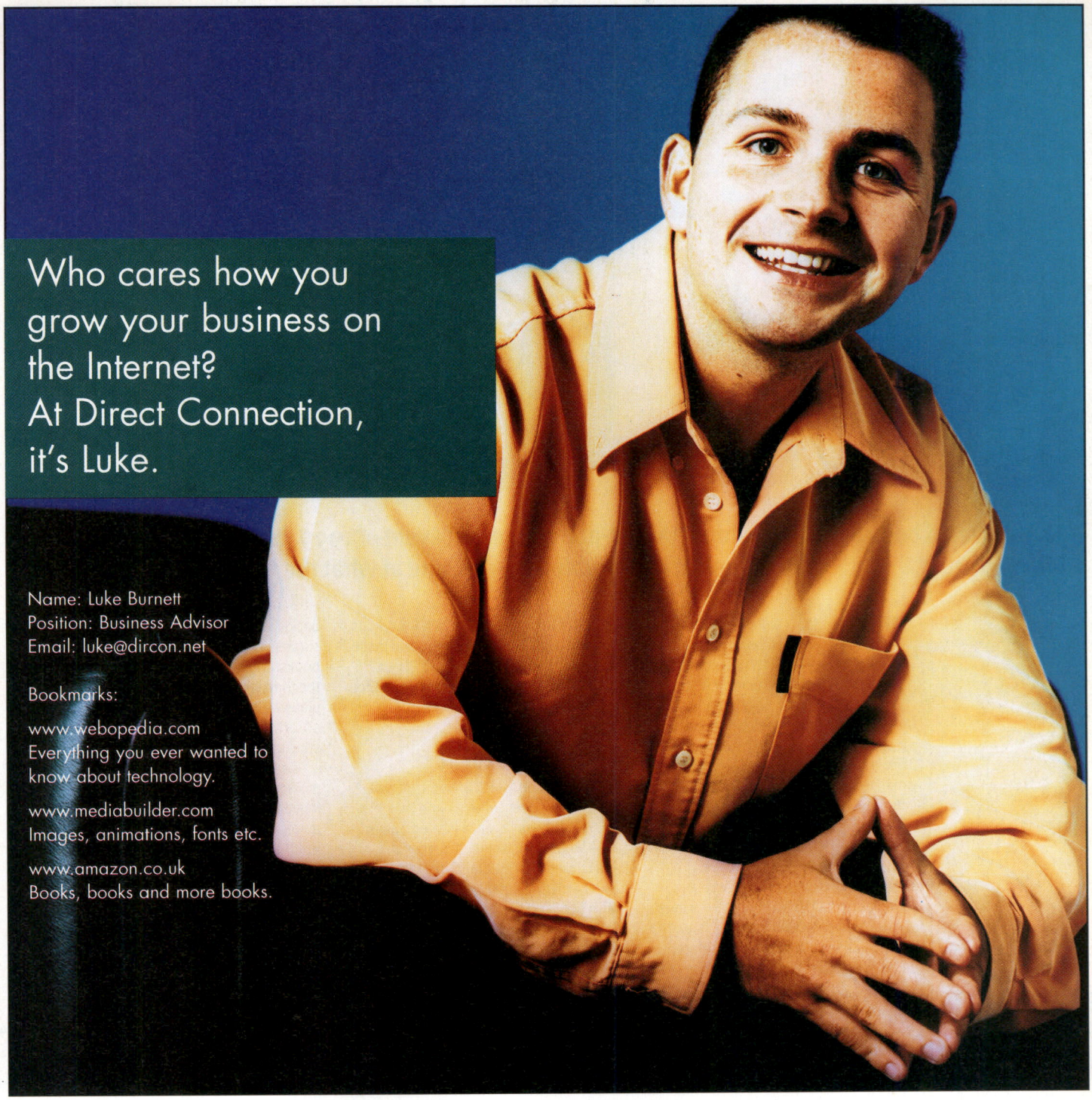
1 Be careful about the nickname you choose. If you pick a nickname like Pussy Galore, you're probably going to attract a certain kind of response, so be prepared for the resulting emails.

2 Most of the chat areas have some kind of blocking facility. If a person has upset you or made inappropriate advances, you can use these features to block out any communication from them.

3 Be careful about arranging to meet people you've met online. You could take a friend with you on the first date, and always make sure you go to a public place.

4 Don't include details about where you live, work or got to college in your personal profile. Somebody could use this information to gain your trust.

5 Check people out. It's easy for somebody to pretend to be something they're not over the Internet. That fabulous woman you've been chatting up might turn out to be an overweight trucker called Wayne. If you're not sure about somebody, try asking other members of the chat group if they can vouch for the honesty of that person.



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boo who?

The arrival of boo.com was the most talked-about Internet event of 1999, but it wasn't an easy birth. Richard Dinnick takes a look at the troubled launch, and at what the future might hold

Global online sports fashion retailer, boo.com, has received a vast amount of media attention since its launch back in early November. The press as a whole – and the specialist press in particular – has been watching to see if and when the site would recover from a series of self-inflicted setbacks.

The company's unfortunate coverage started when it sent out a press release in April trumpeting the launch of an amazing e-commerce experience. "boo.com will offer an impressive range of established fashion brands," it read. "Brands for launch include Northface, Puma, Helly Hansen and Patagonia; footwear from New Balance, Vans, Converse, Royal Elastics; designer sportswear from DKNY Active, and cult ranges such as Fubu."

Boo.com should be commended for managing to deliver on all these major brands, but for some this wasn't enough. Many have pointed out that the site is lacking in key names such as Nike, Adidas, Caterpillar and Tommy Hilfiger. And these perceived shortcomings haven't been helped by the much-maligned virtual shop assistant, Miss Boo.

> "My initial impression of boo.com was that of style over content, and that impression hasn't really altered."

Your first sight of boo.com – a page telling you what you'll need to see the site. Not a Mac, that's for sure

Remember, first impressions count

"My initial impression of boo.com was one of 'style over content', and that impression hasn't really altered," says Pete McDonagh, senior designer at Associated New Media. "The main irritation is the annoying virtual helper, Miss Boo, and her patronising witterings. Shopping is simple, and the ability to view the products from various angles is impressive, but all this effort in design seems to be disguising the fact that the product range is threadbare. Being a Nike and Adidas devotee, I did a search for them. The resulting page informed me that they are not stocked and my interest was diminished further by Miss Boo saying 'You're so specific, try widening your search and see how exciting shopping can be'."

Other brands are absent for one of two reasons. The first is simply because these brands have their own e-commerce sites. The second, though, could prove to be a nail in the site's coffin. Some brands don't go online in order to preserve the exclusivity of their goods.

Show me the money

The idea of boo.com came from Swedish founders, Enrst Malsten, Kajsa Leander and Patrik Hedelin. Malsten and Leander in particular had successful e-commerce backgrounds, having already set up the successful Scandinavian Internet bookstore, bokus.com (**www.bokus.com**), the third largest online bookseller. Their plans were big, bold and brash and attracted the sort of money most Internet start-ups can only dream of.

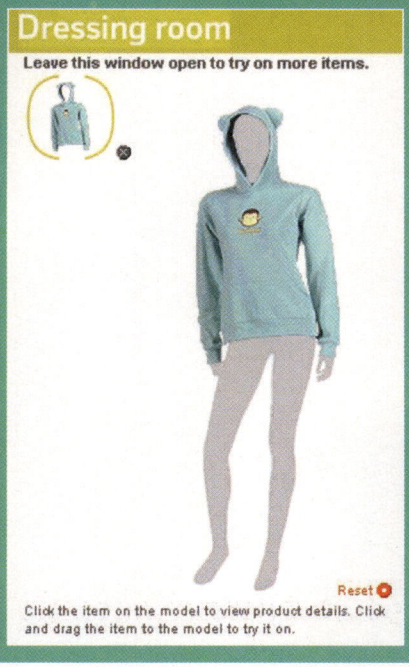
Reports vary as to who exactly has provided the $100 million (around £65 million) to fund boo.com's plans for world domination. Certainties include Markas Holdings, the investment fund of Bernard Arnault, chairman of the fashion and luxury goods group Louis Vuitton Moet-Hennessy (LVMH), 21 Investimenti, the investment arm of the Benetton family holding group, and institutional funding from JP Morgan, SEDCO and Bain Capital.

The idea was that boo.com's customers would be able to search for products intelligently and imaginatively. At launch the site would cover the UK, US, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, with further countries coming online later. There would be free delivery within five days, free returns and a 24 hour help line. On top of this, the shopping experience would be fun, interactive and hidden behind vast amounts of technology.

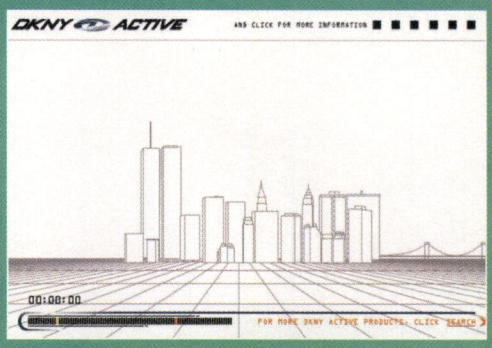
The dream team

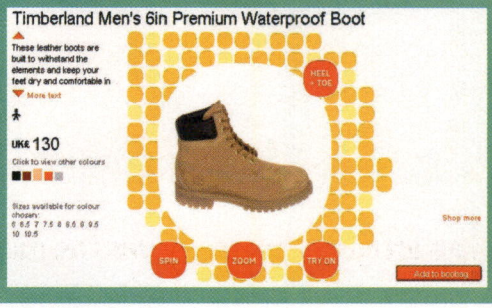
So the company started building a high calibre, global team, headquartered in London, with additional offices in New York, Munich and Stockholm. Among the trumpeted arrivals was Steve Bennet, the former R&D manager at Helwett Packard, to take up the position of chief technical officer. Boo also employed designers Organic to come up with the hip and trendy front end.

But the site had a mass of bugs that delayed the launch by six months, tarnishing the image of boo.com, which had already run a fairly impressive magazine advertising campaign months



There's no denying that boo.com's a good-looking site. It lets you take a close look at the products from all angles and in different colours, but it all takes time and lots of Flash. People want the information, but don't want to have to wait for it. You haven't got long to persuade someone they want to spend £130 on a pair of boots they can't try on





before it eventually went live in November 1999. By then Bennet and Organic were both history.

The site has fallen over twice since launch already and will only work on a PC connected to a V.90 modem or faster connection. Your browser will need to be version four or above with Flash, Java and Ipix plug-ins.

"I think it's a bold site," says Daniel Bonner, creative director at the UK's leading Web design agency, AKQA. "As more and more gets written about it and people see the bad reviews, it becomes easy to jump on that bandwagon." But Bonner thinks the site has its problems. "It's not just about clothes, it's about people coming back," he says. "If it's not quick, people won't come back."

He also picked up on the lack of Mac support. "I had to use someone else's machine to look at it because I use a Mac," Bonner says. "If you were at home with an iMac, you couldn't just pop next door and look at it on your neighbour's Dell. There will be positive things to come out of it, though. Whether that's for them or for others as a cautionary tale, I don't know."

Got a Mac? Tough

Ignoring Macs is certainly not the business boo.com is in. New chief technology officer, Rob Shepherd, recently poached from Sky, was keen to reassure Mac users himself, saying in *New Media Age* that the Mac version would be ready in two weeks. That was four weeks ago. As we go to press, there is still no sign of a Mac compatible version.

Criticism of the site has centred on the technological issues, but the media circus around the site hasn't helped. "People have been saying 'it's over hyped, overblown and over here', but its easy to knock something," says EMAP Online's MD, Roger Green who attended a recent presentation by the founders of boo.com. "You've got to admire the ambition – which is great – and their unwillingness to compromise the vision. They must have calculated the risk of their approach, but I think they're ahead of their time. There's a reason why most famous online shopping sites are dead simple. And boo is incredibly complicated."

> "There's a reason why most famous online shopping sites are dead simple. And boo is incredibly complicated."

Losing their shirts

But perhaps the problem is that the concept of selling expensive clothes online is flawed. Despite boo's best attempts to mimic the shops and changing rooms, how can it work as well – let alone better – online? It could be suggested that the boo launch fiasco could cause venture capital investment in major Internet start-ups to dry up.

"They have assumed that people shop for fun, not for clothes," comments Thomas Hoegh, the founder and MD of Arts Alliance, a leading Internet VC, who confesses to being no fan of boo.com. "From a cutting edge user interface design, they have created something quite interesting. But they haven't made it user friendly."

"As a VC we are the user's best friend because all we want is for them to like the sites we fund so that they will visit them a lot," he continues. "I have to assume that the VCs involved with boo were completely run over by the management team. Come July they were probably screaming 'get the product up, never mind what it does'."

But what of boo's prospective customers? There's been a mixed reaction, but one that errs on the side of the site. This, together with a recent price drop of 10-15 per cent across the board on the site and Shepherd's promise to launch a non-Flash version in 2000 are all indications that the site might have a happier New Year than we might have thought.

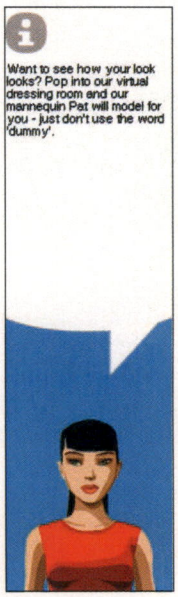
"They've already stripped the site down, and there is new management in place," confirms Hoegh. But he would advise the company to steer clear of going public with an initial public offering for a while yet, since it would force them to show the world where the money has been spent and how things have gone in the company thus far. "Although from a venture capital point of view it would be more scary if they didn't fail, I think they can make it work. We haven't heard the last from boo."

Changing rooms

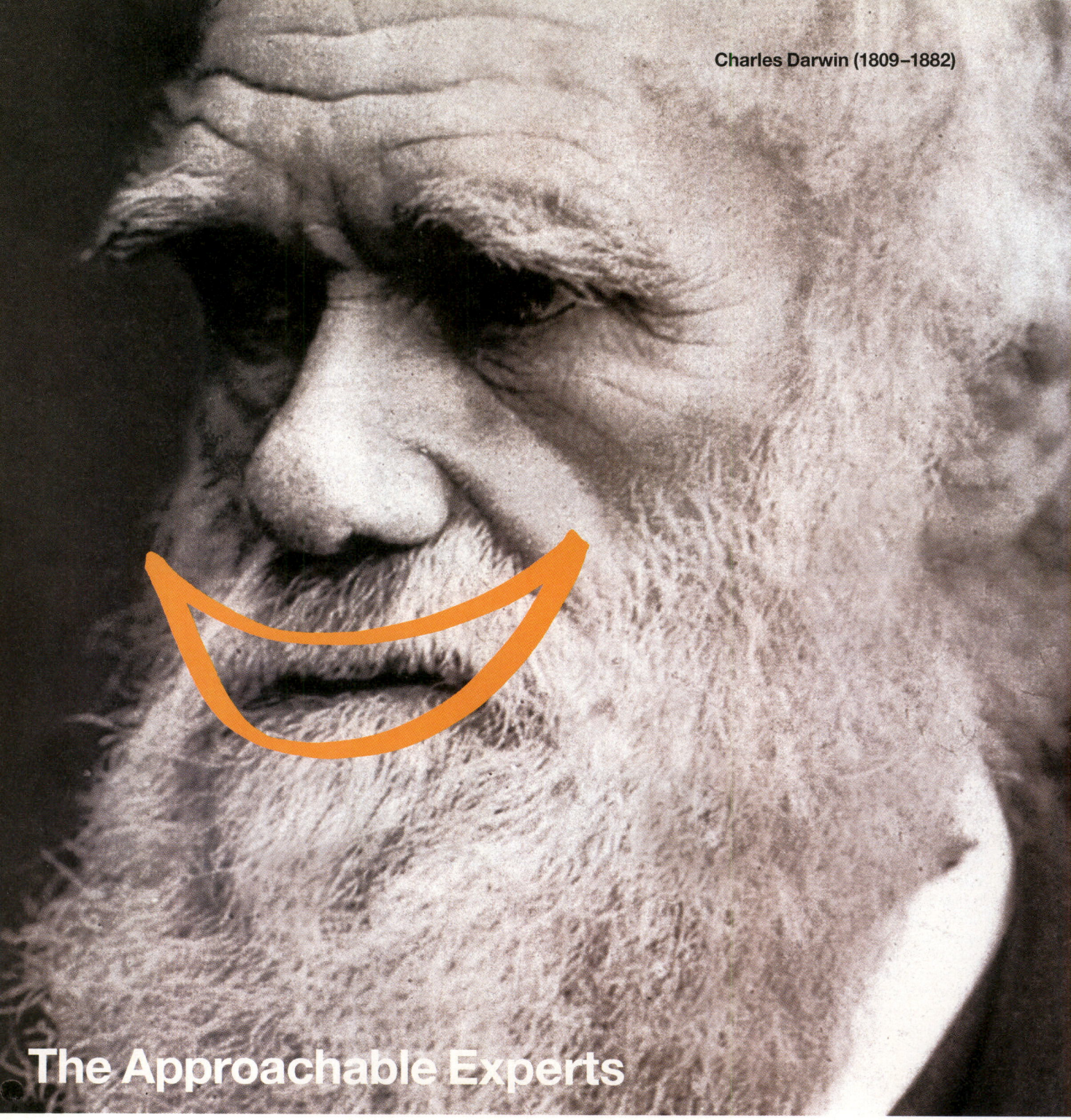
Boo.com has attracted too much media attention to be able to slip away quietly. Indeed, the site has possibly the highest profile of any other. It was recently the only online entry into *MediaWeek*'s top 10 media misses of 1999.

If sales figures are as low as suspected, an IPO is out of the question. So boo will have no option but to go for a second round of funding. But venture capitalists will need a better reason for investment than throwing good money after bad.

Given the problems of selling expensive clothes on the Net, the site might have to change direction. So don't be surprised if boo ends up selling more than just clothes.



Cool and cute, or patronising and irritating? The ever-present Ms Boo



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THE INTERNET BILL OF RIGHTS

We believe you have a right to a quality service from your ISP. Last year, we launched our Internet Bill of Right to campaign for the guaranteed levels of service you deserve. The Bill is now in its consultation phase. Steve Hill gets the opinions of the industry experts.

Last year, we presented a draft version of our Internet Bill of Rights. The 10-point proposal was based on the belief that we, as Internet users, are desperately short of rights.

When you signed up to your ISP, you were asked to agree to a Terms and Conditions document or an Acceptable Use policy. These contain a lot of dull information about what the ISP expects you to do and what you shouldn't do, but precious little about what you can expect in the way of service from the ISP.

The documents are often lengthy (in one case, over four and a half thousand words) and full of confusing legal jargon. It comes as no surprise that most people don't bother to read them and simply click on the 'Agree' button.

Unfortunately, that means you've signed away many of your rights. Many ISPs insert conditions that give them the right to terminate your connection, delete your Web pages or disconnect you with little or no notice.

At *Internet Magazine* we believe that Terms and Conditions and Acceptable Use policies allow ISPs to get away with something just a little short of murder. We also find it unacceptable that there appears to be a culture among ISPs that makes it acceptable to offer a poor service. If you sign Virgin Net's terms and conditions, you even agree that they can change them at any time.

"After just one week, the ISP decided to remove the site without warning."

And when it comes to free ISPs, we don't accept the excuse that just because you don't pay, they have the right to give you a bad service.

We know many of you are as fed up as we are. As we write this article, the phone rings and it's a reader informing us that the mail servers of their well-known business ISP are down. The caller can't send or receive email and he's losing money. A quick look at the ISP's Terms and Condition showed that neither he, nor any of the ISP's other 200,000 customers, were entitled to any compensation.

And then there was the reader who had signed up to Freebeeb.net (**www.freebeeb.net**), the BBC's subscription-free ISP. He chose Freebeeb's Web space to host his new site. To his dismay, after just one week, the ISP decided to remove the site without warning. Freebeeb said it was too popular, although the logfiles showed it had received just 100 hits.

Surely the good-old Beeb isn't allowed to do that? Wrong. Freebeeb's Terms and Conditions state: "We reserve the right to suspend or cancel your user account at our sole discretion."

The subscription-based BT Internet (**www.btinternet.com**) isn't much better. Take a trip to its site and the first thing you see is an ad offering free call 0800 access at the weekends. Unfortunately we would advise everyone to think twice about joining. We've been inundated with complaints about engaged tones.

Sounds terrible? According to the ISP's Term and Conditions faults only have to be corrected: "as soon as they reasonably can".

Finally, many ISPs (particularly the free ones) will only allow Internet access

THE INTERNET BILL OF RIGHTS

To participate in our campaign, copy or cut out this page and fax it to us or your ISP, or email the online version from www.internet-magazine.com/rights/billofrights.html

1 The right to a good level of service

Every ISP should ensure it has sufficient resources and backup systems to guarantee that its service (such as mail servers, usenet news, Web server) is available at least 99 per cent of the time. If the company has technical problems, users should be compensated. Every UK ISP should also agree to abide by the ISPA's code of practice (at www.ispa.org.uk/practise.htm).

2 The right to have constant availability

While some busy tones are inevitable, no user should have to put up with too many. Every ISP should ensure it has sufficient capacity to deal with the incoming calls and that the telephone company can handle these calls. Users should be compensated if the ISP or telephone company can't manage this.

I, as an Internet user, believe I am entitled to the following basic rights...

3 The right to fast page downloads

Because we, as Internet users, are paying for the time we spend looking at Web pages, every ISP should make sure we can download pages at an acceptable speed by ensuring they have enough capacity to handle our Internet traffic.

4 The right to reliable email

We rely on email as a way to communicate, so every ISP should ensure our emails are delivered promptly. We also believe every ISP should ensure its system is reliable enough to guarantee that no incoming email will be lost.

5 The right to good technical support

Technical support is a vital part of using the Internet, so we insist on reliable, easy to contact technical support, staffed by people who are able to answer our questions quickly and accurately. If this technical support costs more than a normal phone call, this should be made clear before we call.

6 The right to know exactly what we are paying for

Every ISP should provide full and comprehensive details of exactly what users will have to pay to use their services, including details of any extra charges and when these will be charged. If there are any charges which will be made by other companies in connection with the services provided (such as domain name registration fees), this should be made clear before I sign up.

internet magazine

7 The right to privacy

Every ISP should do everything within its power to ensure our email, details of the Web pages we look at and our personal details are kept secure and are not supplied to any third parties without our consent. Every ISP should also comply with the LINX Best Current Practice on User Privacy when it is completed (available at www.iupf.org.uk/privacy-bcp.html)

8 The right to freedom of speech

No ISP should remove, alter or restrict access to my Web pages without first making good efforts to contact me and discuss any problems. Any reasons which could cause my Web pages to be removed or blocked (such as surpassing a certain number of hits) should be made clear before I sign up. ISPs should respect my right to freedom of speech and to use the Web space they provide to say what I want without fear of censorship.

9 The right to terminate an account without paying a penalty

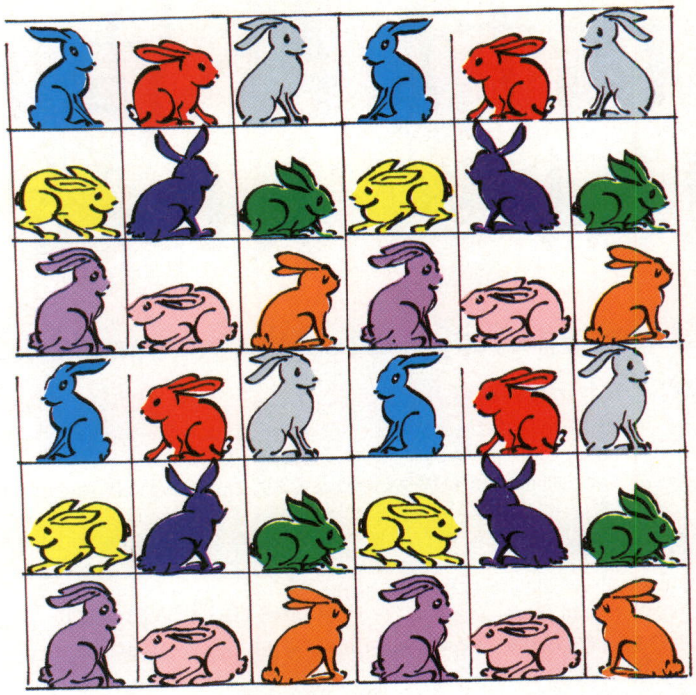
If I decide to terminate an Internet access account, my ISP should not charge me a termination fee. Furthermore, it should process my request to terminate the account within five working days.

10 The right to move domain names and Web sites without hassle

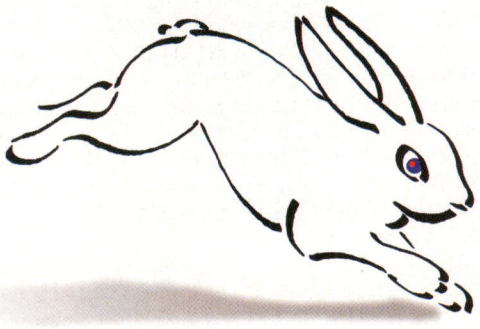
If I decide to move my Web site or domain name to another ISP, the previous host should fully and quickly co-operate with this process and not charge an administration fee for doing so.

Internet Magazine intends to take the Bill of Rights to ISPs, but we need your support. Email us with your comments, amendments, or votes of support at rights@internet.emap.com. Or photocopy this page, sign it and fax it back to us on (0171) 880 7441.

The more of you there are backing this campaign, the more likely we are to win. Get involved!



1 shop hopping



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if you have CLID (Caller Line ID) enabled on your phone line, although they rarely tell you about this before you sign up.

CLID lets the ISP read your phone number. This information is then used to identify the time of the day and how often you log on to the Net. The data is often passed on to advertisers. Many people have CLID cancelled on their phone (often for reasons of privacy) and it comes as quite a shock when they're refused access.

These are just a small selection of the complaints that flood into us on a daily basis. It's clear that the ISP industry needs to get its house in order. If you're fed up with bad service, we urge you to sign our Bill of Rights.

The ISPs

As part of the consultation phase, we took the Bill to a range of experts in the field. First, it was important to ensure that our Bill Of Rights is achievable, so we needed to get advice from a body representing the ISPs.

tell customers what they should demand from ISPs. But he denied that there was any serious problem with the service provided by ISPA members.

"There's a lot of competition in the ISP market. If you don't get fast download speeds or continually get engaged tones all you have to do is change your ISP. It's no hassle to put a CD-ROM in a computer and sign up to another service. If enough people go elsewhere, the ISP will go out of business and more reliable ones will move in." Cold comfort indeed. Wouldn't you rather your ISP did its job than having to change your email address, take your homepage down and find a new home for it, or watch while your business loses money because your site isn't available?

Lansman also justified some Terms and Conditions policies. "Most ISPs are not making great a deal of money and many are terrified of being sued. If the Terms and Conditions seem harsh, it's normally because the ISPs are protecting their hides. They can be sued for

Censorship
Virgin Net

In August 1997, Virgin Net closed the account of a subscriber who published a Web site containing a game called the Dunblane Massacre. The game spoofed the Scotland massacre of 16 school children and their teacher four years ago, with winners receiving a badge declaring them the "fastest gun in Dunblane."

Cyber liberty groups have said that Virgin Net's action to censor the site at its sole discretion and without police involvement is worrying.

with what the laws on obscene, indecent and defamatory material."

But surely you can't have general terms such Global Internet's, which state that it reserves "the right to remove any page on our servers, at any time and for any reason"?

"It's in the interests of ISPs to keep users happy."

The Internet Service Providers Association (**www.ispa.org.uk**) was established in 1995 with the aim of promoting the interests of ISPs. Nicholas Lansman, ISPA secretary general, supported the Bill of Rights as a way to

Poor service
Force 9

Force 9, a Sheffield-based ISP, was plagued with problems in last year. Up to 50 per cent of its users were unable to access their email or upload pages to Web space. Those affected included business account holders as well as users of F9's subcription-free service. Lee Strafford, chief operations manager at F9 said the problem was down to a corrupted file server and the ISP was in the process of seeking compensation from Sun Microsystems for the fault. Would they pass the compensation on to any F9 subscribers? No. As Mr Strafford stated, all customers had signed a No Liability agreement. In the Terms and Conditions it states "We shall not be liable for any consequential losses you may suffer. You will not be eligible for any compensation because you cannot use the service or because of a failure, suspension or withdrawal of all or part of the service." Force 9 has since resolved its server problems.

defamation, obscenity, copyright theft... the list goes on. The law must realise that the ISPs should not be held liable for what they carry. The Royal Mail isn't responsible for naughty pictures that come through the post." But why should subscribers' quality of service suffer?

Lansman admitted there is a problem with some ISPs who are not ISPA members. "We do need to sort out the likes of Screaming.net who haven't joined the ISPA and, in the past, have clearly not delivered what they promised. Having a Bill of Rights is great for this, but how could you enforce it?"

As part of 'the right to a good level of service' we encourage all ISPs to join the ISPA and to sign its Code of Practice.

ISPs covering around 80 per cent of the market have signed the Code, but there are some notable absentees.

Lansman explains: "ISPs can be quite stingy. Many spend all their money on marketing and they don't wish to pay the £650 it costs to join the ISPA. We would advise your readers to check out the ISPA site and sign up to one of our members."

The consumers

We needed advice on consumer law and how it affects ISPs, so we took our Bill of Rights to the Consumer's Association (**www.which.net**), an independent body that investigates consumer complaints. Ajay Patel, principal lawyer, supported the argument that Terms and Conditions tend to be harsh.

"It's often the case that ISPs want to cover themselves for every eventuality. They don't want to be sued," said Patel. "For example, I don't think you can read say that that the ISPs wish to censor Web site material. They're having to comply

Patel says: "It may be that consumers should have the right to have terms like that defined better." He adds that the argument that users who sign up to subscription-free ISP can't expect a high quality service has no relevance.

"I don't think that using a free or subscription service would make any difference in the view of a court. The system of payment is usually not relevant. Let's face it, the so-called free ISPs aren't really free anyway – you pay for them through call traffic and technical support charges."

We pointed out that the Freeserve (**www.freeserve.net**) Terms and Conditions state: 'We reserve the right to suspend, restrict, or terminate your access to Freeserve for any reason.'

Patel says: "It would be interesting to look at this under the Unfair Contract Act. It's recently been updated to include new regulations from Europe about what can and can not be put in contracts. The Supply of Goods and Services Act may also be relevant. This states that a service has to be provided with 'reasonable care and skill." It's unlikely that free ISPs would be except from this."

Ajay Patel left us with some parting advice. "Looking into the ISP's Terms and Conditions is an interesting exercise. We would advise everyone to read them before they sign up to an ISP."

Can the harsh terms and conditions regarding the removal of Web sites be put down to the ISPs being terrified about being found on the wrong side of the law or is there something more to this?

The freedom fighter

We took our Bill of Rights to Internet Freedom (**www.netfreedom.org**), a

Domain name trouble
Access Internet

Companies often believe they own a domain name that has been registered for them, but you'd better check the small print. An example of the risk is a dispute that centred on the domain name clarkesonline.co.uk. The name was chosen by Sussex-based Clarkes Stationers when it decided to develop a Web site. The company contracted Web services company Access Internet to register the name and design its Web site. However, when the relationship between the two broke down, the owner of Clarkes Stationers was dismayed to discover that Access Internet was claiming ownership of the domain name. It rendered useless more than 1,500 catalogues printed with the URL which had cost the owner over £30,000 to print. Access Internet wanted £3,000 to release the name. Only after considerable publicity, the company released the name for the original registration fee of £49 plus VAT "as a gesture of goodwill."

group that campaigns for freedom of expression online. Chris Ellison, its co-founder, explained that ISPs voluntarily choose to censor material even when it doesn't break the law.

"For too long now, ISPs have been forcing their customers to sign away their democratic rights through agreeing to restrictive terms of service," says Ellison. "The vast majority of ISPs require their customers to not send messages that might be 'abusive', 'menacing' or 'offensive'. None of these are prohibited under UK law. As a result, ISPs have gained unprecedented powers to control transmission of material over the Net."

Ellison explains that there is a growing list of Web sites that have been closed or suspended by ISPs on their own initiative. These include the closure of 23 Irish Heritage discussion boards on AOL in December of 1998. AOL said that the political forums had included profanity and personal attacks. *The Irish People*, an Irish nationalist newspaper, criticised AOL's actions as politically motivated and "intended to extinguish a growing firestorm of pro-republican news and comment in the Forum."

It's worth noting that most ISPs' Terms and Conditions state that they reserve the right to remove newsgroup postings.

"Almost all UK ISPs now admit that they regularly censor certain newsgroups regardless of individual items, and without being subject to Court Orders," says Ellison. "Despite lacking any statutory powers itself, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) claims that ISPs have removed over 9000 items on the basis of its instructions, and 94 per cent of the material ISPs remove is considered by neither judge nor jury.

Our Bill Of Rights states that "Every ISP should do everything within its power to ensure our email, details of the Web pages we look at and our personal details are kept secure and are not supplied to any third party without our consent."

Chris Ellison believes that this is a growing area of concern: "Many ISPs let the police intercept email and examine Web logs without the written consent of the Home Secretary. This informal arrangement follows the brokering of a controversial 'memorandum of understanding' between the police and industry representatives in August 1998.

Ellison concludes: "ISPs are not responsible for the content of material transmitted over the Net. They are communications providers, not publishers. Net users should have the right to transmit whatever they choose in the knowledge that it is private and can only be prevented on the basis of a judgement by the Courts.

The registry

Judging by the number of queries and complaints we receive, we know that point 10 of our Bill, 'the right to move domain names and Web sites without hassle', is vital. Moving a site can and should be a simple process, but many ISPs seem to be unwilling to co-operate. Users can be charged mysterious 'admin' fees that can run into thousands of pounds. Other ISPs make their customers' life difficult simply by dragging their feet.

We took our Bill of Rights to Nominet UK (**www.nic.uk**), the national registry for all Internet domain names ending .uk.

A spokeswoman for Nominet said that, with the advent of free domain name registration, there has been a rush to get online and many people don't realise they will be charged if they subsequently try to move the domain name to another ISP.

Second, and more significantly, there have been a number of cases where an ISP has tried to prevent the transfer of a domain name as a result of a disagreement with its customer.

This situation usually arises where there is an outstanding customer debt, which might or might not relate to the domain name registration.

Legal advice from Nominet is that, generally, ISPs have no right to prevent the transfer of a domain name taking place. But if the Terms and Conditions include specific reference to the issue of Domain Name transfer, the ISP may be able to prevent it.

"In cases where there is no specific clause included in the ISP's Terms and Conditions enabling the ISP to prevent the transfer of the domain name, Nominet will usually go ahead and transfer it," says Lesley Cowley, operations director of Nominet UK.

"However, if such clauses exist, Nominet cannot act unilaterally, as to do so would constitute interference with a third party contract. We strongly urge users to check the Terms and Conditions of their ISP before signing up so that they don't subsequently get caught out." Nominet UK has pledged its support for our campaign.

"We reserve the right to suspend, restrict, or terminate your access for any reason."

The call to action

The next stage of our campaign is to seek the opinions of you, our readers. If you agree with the Bill, we urge you email, write or. We are also keen to hear about more of your experiences, both good and bad.We cannot stress how important it is to become involved. Please take the time to sign the Bill of Rights and send it to us. We'll be taking your responses to the ISPs. im

What a typical ISP promises in its publicity, and what it should really be mentioning

Advert: 50 Mb of Web space for you to build your own Web site.
Reality: *We'll close your site if it becomes too popular or we don't like its content.*

Advert: V.90 56K supported
Reality: *We don't guarantee fast downloads*

Advert: First class technical support. 24 hours day, seven days a week.
Reality: *It may cost anything up to £1 a minute and you might not even be able to get through at busy times.*

Advert: Unlimited access to the Net.
Reality: *But we can't actually guarantee that it will work and we might prevent you from accessing the Net for any reason.*

Advert: Unlimited number of email addresses.
Reality: *You're email isn't private and we can't guarantee that we won't lose the email you send.*

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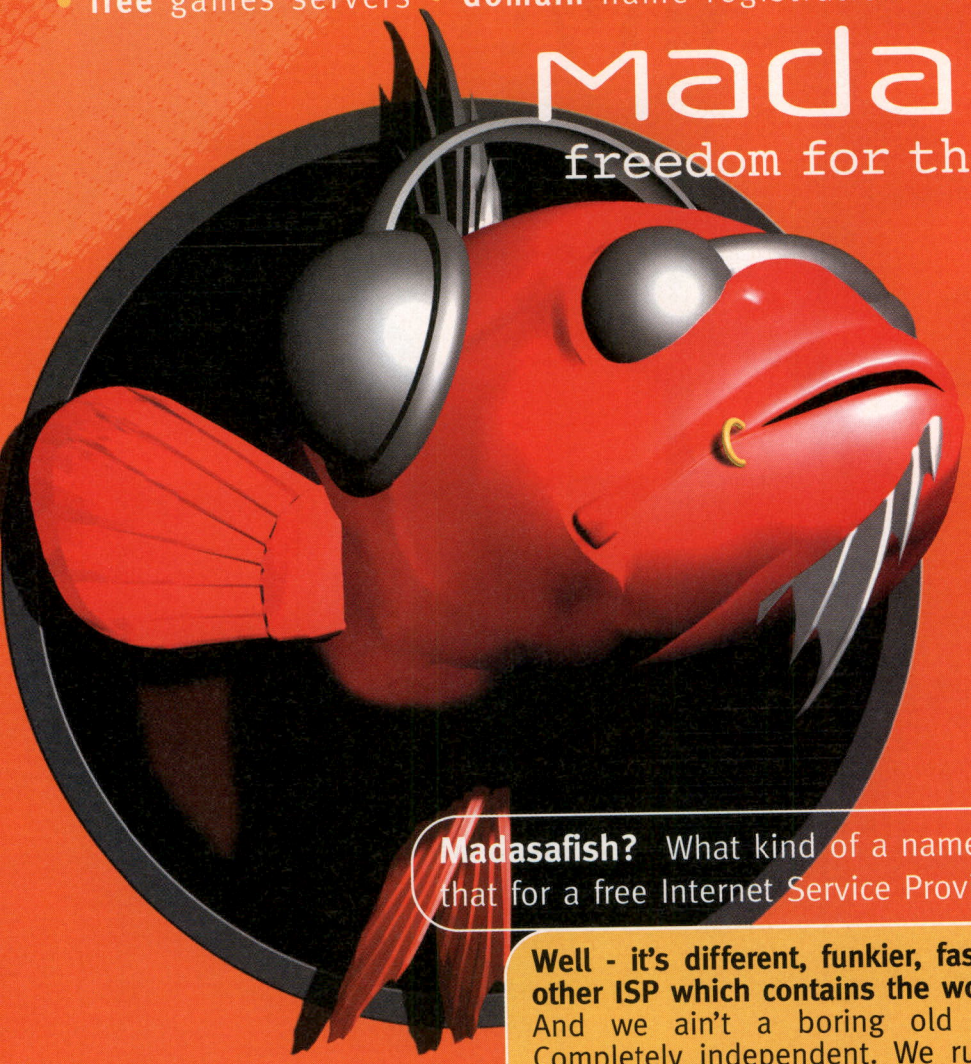
madasafish

freedom for the net generation



Madasafish? What kind of a name's that for a free Internet Service Provider?

Well - it's different, funkier, faster and friendlier than any other ISP which contains the word free.
And we ain't a boring old supermarket chain either. Completely independent. We run our own network - with superfast connectivity. And our own support centre.

We know what you want from your ISP.
You want it free. Fast. With unlimited webspace, email, newsgroups. Free fast games servers. Free MP3 music to go. The full monty...

And we know what you really really don't want.
You don't want downtime, engaged tones and a naff email address.

madasafish
Fast, free ISP with attitude

If you have any problems, don't panic, call **01851 777727** and one of our esteemed customer service agents will help you solve it right away. And don't worry - it's not a premium rate call (like some other "free" ISPs) just your telephone provider's normal charges...

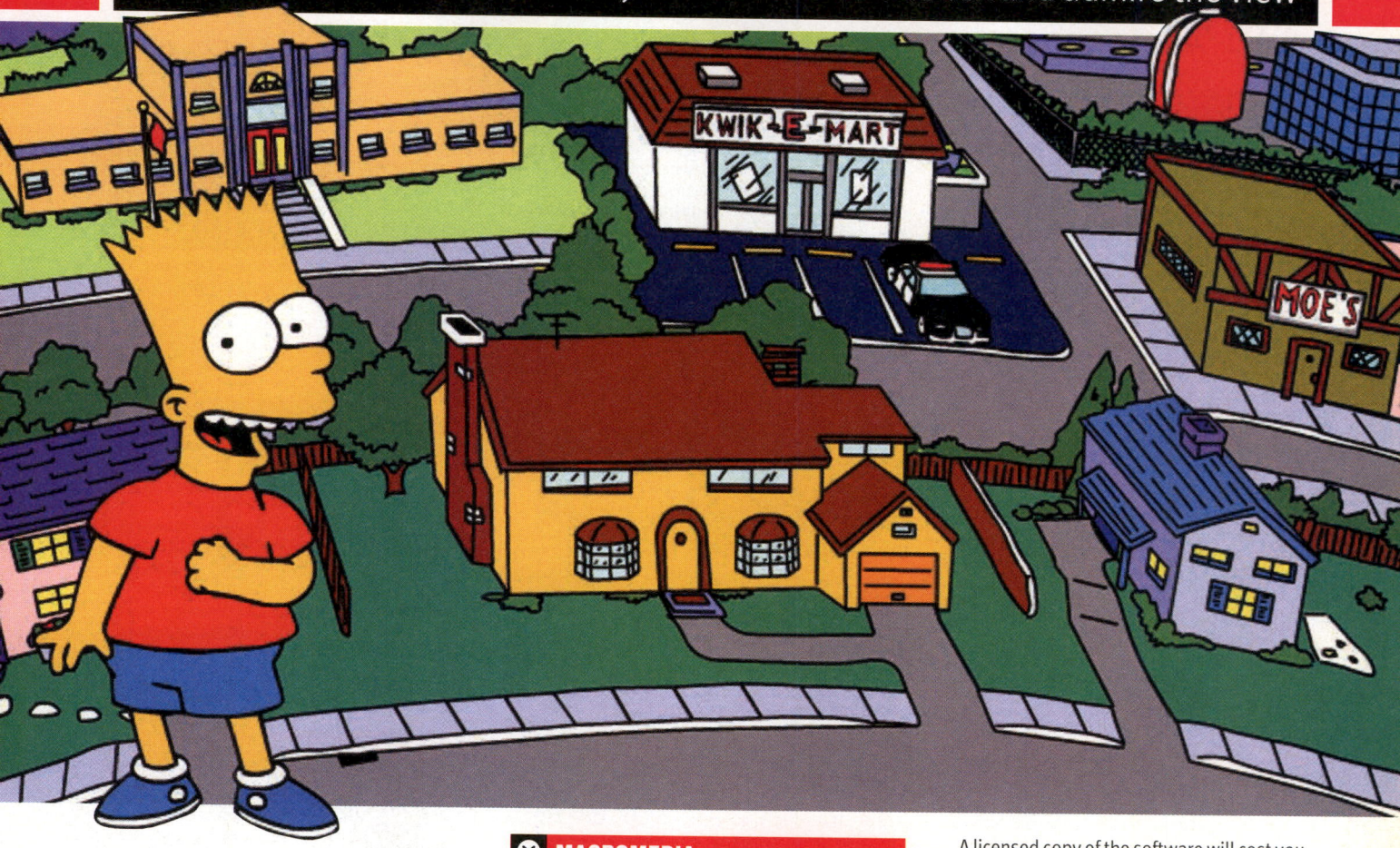
So that's it then. It's Madasafish for you. You get everything you want - with no downtime and no engaged tones. And you get a Madasafish email address. Sorted.

for FREE internet access call **0800 0273373** or visit

www.madasafish.com for details

Flash sites

Some of the best-looking sites on the Web use Flash for animation, and it's the tool of choice for professional designers. **Paul Bennett** shows you the best examples of Flash on the Web. All you have to do is sit back and admire the view



It's official. Flash, the media darling of the Internet industry, is the favoured solution for all of those out of this world Web sites. "Flash... Flash I love you," Web developers purr, "but we only have 14 hours to save the earth." Its reputation of jazzing up static Web pages is justified, but is this tool just a development toy or could it really be saviour of the universe?

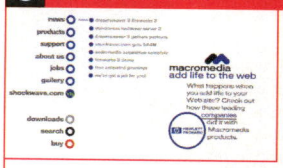
A couple of years ago, animated Web sequences looked like cardboard Mr. Benn cutouts. Flash is credited with bringing real animation to the Web, and sites can now – as if by magic – present smooth, anti-aliased graphics and complicated animated sequences.

The animations are also small, quick to download and come streamed, like RealPlayer. Flash 4 is the latest version of this software, and it's already a hit with the Macromedia cognoscenti brought up with the graphics suites of Fireworks and Dreamweaver.

It's easy to see why Flash has become so successful in the design world. It opens up new and exciting avenues, so you can do whizzy things like create translucent graphics, vary opacity levels, sprite animation and morph graphics (see **www.macromedia.com/software /flash /productinfo/features/basic_tour/shape _morphing.html** for more details). Translated, this means you'll now find it even easier to create animated buttons, pop-up menus, checkboxes and games.

With Flash 4 comes long-awaited support for the MP3 and Apple QuickTime file formats. Like its household cleaner namesake, Flash does the hard work, so you don't have to.

MACROMEDIA



This is one of the most Flashed up sites around, and you can get all the downloads and updates to keep you ahead on the animation front. You'll also find the Flash Site of the Day (and its archive) here, which is a top resource for state of the art Flash sites. This is where all your Flash tours of the Web should start.

www.macromedia.com

A licensed copy of the software will cost you $299 (£194), or $129 (£84) to upgrade if you have Flash 3. You can download the Flash trial, called flash4full.exe (flash4upg.exe to upgrade) at **www.macromedia.com/software /flash/trial**. To use Flash on a Mac you'll need to install the 13Mb flash4full.sea.hqx, or upgrade with the flash4upg.sea.hpx file.

If you're more of a browser than a designer, you can just sit back and enjoy the show. Flash is already built into most modern browsers, so you don't need to worry about downloads or plug-ins.

According to research from NPD, 88.3 per cent of Web users can experience Flash content without installing a player – that's over 140 million people, and this includes Macintosh, Windows, Solaris and Linux users.

By the spring, Nua (**www.nua.ie/surveys /how_many_online /index.html**) predicts that, of the 201 million anticipated Internet users, 177.4 million will have a Flash compatible browser. You can always take the Flash Test at **www.macromedia.com**.

We've trawled the galaxy to find the best Flash has to offer – turn the page to begin.

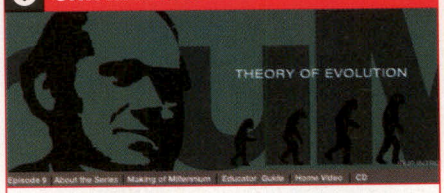
FILM AND TELEVISION

007

The lights go down, the curtain rises and for the first couple of minutes you could be sitting in a cinema watching any James Bond film from the past 38 years. Except this time, you're watching the timeless opening sequence from the new Bond site and former *Internet Magazine* Site of the Month.

www.007.com

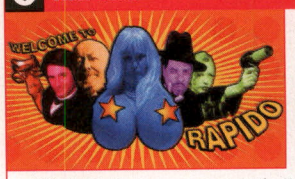
CNN INTERACTIVE



The dynamic content from these media giants includes video and audio highlights, timelines, maps, stories, and games. There's even a millennium documentary.

http://cnn.com/SPECIALS/1999/millennium

RAPIDO

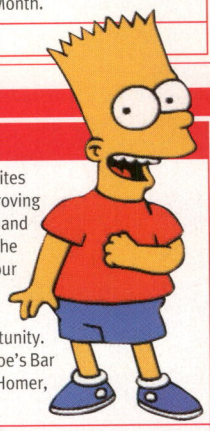


The producers of *Eurotrash*, *Baadasss TV* and *The Girlie Show* have managed to successfully translate the look and feel of their programmes onto the Web. Antoine de Caunes steers you through a cavalcade of visual and sensual stimulation. There's the usual naughtiness, but the proliferation of new windows keeps the temperature down.

www.rapido.co.uk

CARTOONS

THE SIMPSONS



You'll find thousands of Web sites dedicated to *The Simpsons*, proving it's still an immensely popular and appealing cartoon. Bart does the honours on this whistlestop tour of Springfield, but each character has something to say if you give them the opportunity. Check out the Kwik-E-Mart, Moe's Bar or spend a quiet night in with Homer, Marge and Lisa.

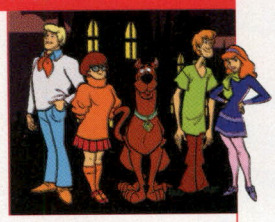
www.margsimpson.com/simpsons/simpson2.htm

DISNEY

It would've been rather embarrassing if Disney wasn't a convert to the Flash fellowship. As it is, this site is filmed in glorious Macromedia Technicolor, Dolby stereo sound and animated whistles and bells. This portal dominates the market in American homes boasting one million individual site visits each day. Most visitors probably arrive early to play with the animated keyboard 'wizmo'. Made entirely in Flash, it lets you play a selection of tunes by following colour-coded musical notes.

www.disney.com

CARTOON NETWORK

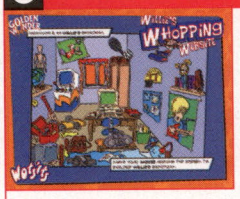


Where else can you get step by step guidelines on how to create a Scooby Sandwich? More to the point, where else can you find a live Scooby Web cam? Only at Cartoon Network. It's still the best of breed this side of the pond, and it was no surprise to see it scoop best site in the youth category at last year's Yell Awards.

www.cartoon-network.co.uk

FOOD AND DRINK

WOTSITS



You need to poke around Willie's bedroom to get the most from this entertaining and deliberately cheesy offering. The *Krypton Factor*-style mental agility tests become a Meccano Whoosh Machine – you have to assemble components in the correct order to produce the crunch/collapse/melt sequence.

www.wotsits.co.uk

CADBURYS

On the Cadburys site you'll find a chocolate encyclopedia, some nutty downloads and the history of chocolate – all wrapped up in some stylish navigation. The links to Dairy Milk (**www.dairymilk.co.uk/frameset.htm**), Chunky (**www.cadburys-chunky.co.uk/frameset.htm**) and the promise of a new-look Creme Egg site (**www.cremeegg.co.uk**) add a fuller flavour.

www.cadbury.co.uk

DOMINOS

Before Tesco, Sainsburys and Iceland were delivering to your door, Dominos was conducting trials in Milton Keynes. The service and the mopeds have been revamped and you can now order your favourite kind of pizza from 190 stores around the UK.

www.dominos.co.uk

GAMES

The Net has a cornucopia of games to play, and this is an area that Flash excels in. You can play online versions of popular board games, such as Dingbats (**www.dingbats.net**) in all its variations. Or if murder mystery is more your thang, try Hasbro's Cluedo site (**www.cluedo.com**), which replicates the graphical look and feel of the Cluedo CD-ROM. As different episodes are played out, you can trace the character movements as they scuttle between the billiard room, conservatory and study. Have a stab at who you think committed the crime.

If you want to try your luck on games that are more akin to consoles , take a look at Jamba (**www.jamba.co.uk**). This award-winning site has a plethora of Flashed up games that'll keep you amused for hours. And if you're feeling more creative, try Clickwork's Project:Mouse (**www.clickworks.co.uk**), where you can build a wacky mouse and submit it to the site for the world to see. Think of it as an online version of *Take Hart* for the technically gifted.

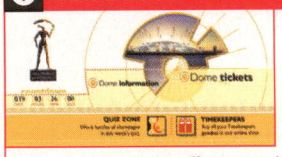
If you already have all the games you could wish for on your console, take a look at the manufacturer's Web site.

Sega's Dreamcast has used Flash heavily on its site (**www.dreamcast-europe.com/english/intro.htm**), which makes it slow to navigate. But you can check out upcoming releases and buy the console and games from the site.

Meanwhile, Sega's main rival, the Sony PlayStation (**www.playstation-europe.com**), has used Flash to promote its PSextreme channel. Simply pick a chromosome of your choice to join.

BUSINESS

DOME 2000



A cross between an information resource, an e-ticketing site and an entertainment area, the Millennium Experience offers a seamless slide show of what's on and what to do in the Dome. Fast forward, press the pause button (for slower readers) or skip straight to the show. Dome 2000 was a former *Internet Magazine* Site of the Month and one of our Bookmarks of the Century.

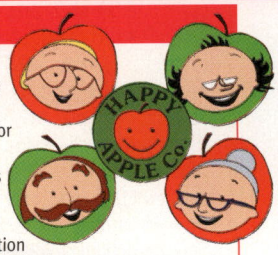
www.dome2000.co.uk

BRITISH EXCELLENCE

Proudly flying the Union Jack, this site is a database of leading British companies. Aardman Animations, creators of *Wallace and Gromit*, rub shoulders with Wisdom, creators of fine toothbrushes. As a flat HTML file, this would be extremely dull, so Blueberry Web Design simply 'jazzed it up a bit' with Flash.

www.britishexcellence.co.uk

E-SENSE

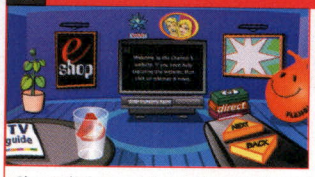


This business site can automatically detect if you have a Flash-enabled browser and, as you wait for the lift to take you to the presentation suite, there's a sound check. It's a simple but effective interactive Flash presentation on e-business. Second floor perfumery, kitchenware and supply chain management – going up.

www.esense.co.uk

spotlightonFlashsites

CHANNEL 5

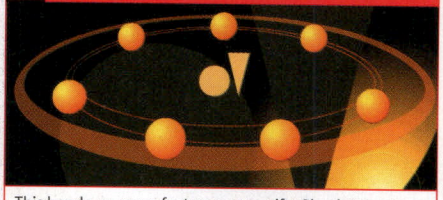


The BBC focuses on authoritative news, Channel 4 is classy and minimalist. So Channel 5 has unashamedly opted for mainstream entertainment. But any site with a spacehopper on its opening page can't be all bad. Move to Drizzle Beach, the C5 e-soap and use the Web cam to explore beach life.

www.channel5.co.uk

EDUCATION

MUSEUM OF SCIENCE & INDUSTRY



This hands-on arena features some nifty Shockwave games, streaming video and lashings of VRML. The navigation through this site comes courtesy of Flash.

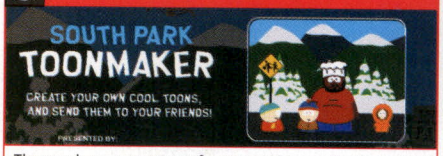
www.msim.org.uk/shocked/home.html

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

This educational establishment is using Flash to teach its teachers. The SmartPanel is a technology-enhanced classroom control suite, a beginner's guide for technophobic staff. Lesson one is using your video recorder. After turning the power system on, lowering the screen and dimming the lights, you're ready to select VCR by pressing the button. Click and go.

http://smartpanel.stanford.edu/howdol/vcr.html

SHOCKWAVE



The number one resource for cartoon lovers. *South Park* has become something of a dominant force in the past year, but don't forget classics like *Dilbert*, *Spiderman* and *Peanuts*. You can get a brief synopsis of each cartoon, as well as an estimate of how long it'll take you to download.

www.shockwave.com/bin/shockwave/main/frame_set.jsp

ADVERTISING

KMGI

The philosophy behind this ad agency is to deliver full-screen animation to 14.4Kbps modem users. It's even created its home page exclusively in Flash. So when it wanted to showcase online TV ads, the choice was easy. Its Flash ads were used by Cybuy to promote *The Blair Witch Project* release on DVD.

www.kmgi.com/cybuy/bwp

NOVELL

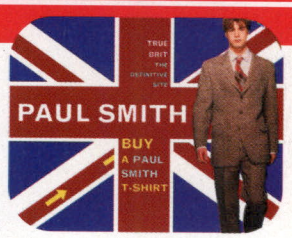
In an increasingly sceptical Web world, the benefits of creating an appealing advertising banner that stands out from the crowd can't be stressed enough. Just ask Novell, which experienced a 32 per cent increase in brand perception and a whopping 430 per cent increase in user click-throughs when its banner ads started using Flash to promote its NetWare 5 product.

www.novell.com

CLOTHING

Flash has become *de rigeur* for fashion sites. At Sole Trader (**www.sole-trader.co.uk**) you get a funky soundtrack, classy graphics, and a list of brands and shop branches before you eventually reach the shoes. Not interested in Flash footwear? Try the Ted Baker (**www.tedbaker.co.uk**) site where you can chose your garment, rotate it, take a closer peek, and even select your preferred colour.

If selling clothes online is to take off, Ted Baker makes a good role model, one that online fashion retailer Boo.com (**www.boo.com**) might do well to emulate. The Flash on Boo's site is spectacular, but it pushes the amount of animation that any one site can handle to the limits.



Finally, a site that puts the cool in Cool Britannia is the decidedly British Paul Smith site (**www.paulsmith.co.uk**). It shows off the latest range of clothing and the versatility of Flash.

CARS

MITSUBISHI

Flash animations highlight the various features of this extensive site. Followers of the World Rally Championship should pull in for driver details, rally information, some great photography and a downloadable rally driving game.

www.mitsubishi-cars.co.uk

VW BEETLE

The custom of headlight flashing between VW Beetle owners threatens to boil over into full-blown road rage, and owners face shame, ignominy and occasional verbal abuse if they become too flash-happy. But if you own a Beetle you can now practice your flashing techniques and score points online. If you flash the wrong make and model, you lose points and credibility. Flash the fuzz and you're nicked!

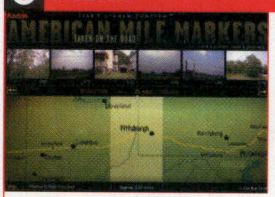
www.newbeetle.co.uk

JORDAN

A Flash site from Eddie Jordan and his team. References to Damon Hill will probably be removed soon, but you can expect the same level of excitement, pit stop action and fanfare during qualification and on race day. One of the only Grand Prix sites to have pages dedicated to its rivals.

www.jordangp.com

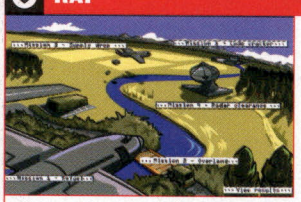
KODAK



Take an odometer-rigged camera and a mad yank with a happy trigger finger, and the result is thousands of photos. Kodak has merged these into a master map file and added layers for highways, state names and city names. By importing the file into Flash, you get a scaleable, interactive map of the US.

www.kodak.com/go/ontheroad

RAF



Take control of your future and join those magnificent men in their flying machines. You get to choose a mission, refuel, drop supplies and break the code. The final objective is to recover a stolen Eurofighter from an enemy base. It's child's play!

www.raf-careers.raf.mod.uk

CHARLOTTE STREET

This portal site for women uses Flash for its navigation and opening sequence. Unfortunately, when you select one of the sections, such as leisure and free time, the menu obscures the rest of the sections (shown above).

www.charlottestreet.com

As your Internet
business needs grow...

net start

Netstart is the flexible approach to a business Internet solution. What we mean by flexible is that this account works equally well for both single computer accessing the Internet via an analogue modem or a whole company with hundreds of employees using an Internet server solution connected via 128K ISDN. Whether you are a small or large business, netstart is the solution to your Internet needs as you simply configure and manage your account using an online interface. Whatever your Internet needs are, netstart will grow with your ever expanding business needs. All for the low cost of £9.99+VAT!

netstart includes:

- **Personalised portal interface which enables you to manage your account online**
- **Single user or network access**
- **Free .uk domain name registration**
- **Unlimited web space to create your own site**
- **Support for Microsoft FrontPage Extensions**
- **CGI server allowing you to create and run your own scripts**
- **Unix based shell server with standard tools**
- **Detailed text and graphical statistic reports about traffic to your website**
- **Search engine submission tool**
- **Web based e-mail**
- **Static IP address**
- **Unlimited Pop3 e-mail addresses or SMTP e-mail**
- **Fax-2-email, a unique fax number allowing you to receive faxes as e-mail**
- **Support for Standard modems , K56flex, X2, V.90 and ISDN up to 128k**
- **Connection at local call rates**
- **Free technical support available 7 days a week**

net complete

Any company wishing to connect their network to the Internet ought to consider the benefits of having a dedicated and exclusive 'fast path to the Net' permanently connected with a leased line. Advantages are maximum data throughput speeds, 24hr Internet presence and availability and fixed manageable costs. Plusnet will arrange for a dedicated telecom circuit to be installed, this line will be connected to your company's computer network and our Internet network via a router or using the NetPilot Internet Branch Exchange below. The speed of your connection can be upgraded on a modular basis as your requirements grow. A dedicated and direct connection truly empowers your business to capitalise on e-commerce and e-business opportunities. Selling and communicating across the Internet truly is the way forward and with netcomplete your business will be able to really "Work the Internet." At these prices it really is low cost to get a permanent connection!

Capacity	Installation Cost*	London Annual Rental*	Within 50K of Major City*
64K	£500	£3,795.25	£3,795.25
128K	£1,500	£6,645.25	£8,545.25
256K	£1,500	£9,495.25	£11,395.25
2MB	£6,100	£21,845.25	£28,495.25

net pilot

Need to put more than one of your companies computer online? Well Internet access is unbelievably easy and controllable with netpilot. It's an integrated, fit-and-forget Internet Branch Exchange, providing everything you'll ever need for secure company-wide email and web browsing in a single box. All PC users connected to your LAN can be given controlled Internet access. You just need a netsart account and an ISDN line while netpilot provides the rest. purchase a netpilot for the low cost of £1495+VAT and get your LAN connected to the Internet!

You won't worry about phone bills going through the roof. You'll be sure that no-one wastes time looking at inappropriate web sites. Installation and management is quick and simple - whether you have a handful of users or hundreds. You don't even need any IT expertise.

The difficult problem of network security has been tackled, too. NetPilot's built-in firewall has been accredited by Checkmark, an independent testing and standards organisation, which found that it equals the security of firewalls from specialist vendors.

For more information on this exciting product visit www.plus.net.uk.

...our solutions grow with you.

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*Prices subject to survey

sitesurvey

This month's top sites rated by experts // brief / budget / content / design

Ready2Shop

www.ready2shop.com

Get your shopping advice online from posh birds Susannah and Trinny

Ready2shop is the first of a batch of sites to be launched under the Ready2 brand - come April we'll see a whole hoard of them including Ready2party and Ready2heal. Ready2 is the brainchild of Susannah Constantine and Trinny Woodall; the pair have already built a name for themselves in the fashion world with their weekly fashion advice page in the Telegraph and their TV spots on Richard and Judy.

Welcome to Ready2shop, the secret weapon for women who want to shop smarter.

The Internet hit them as the next logical step for their skills. "In the Telegraph our advice is one dimensional," Trinny Woodall explains. "The Internet allows you to say 'this is what I want, now where can I get it?'." This is not an online shopping mall, instead you tell the site that you're looking for a new coat in size 14 say and Ready2shop scours the 3,000 strong database of clothes, accessories, beauty products and gifts and pulls up an appropriate selection. All the clothes have been checked out by Trinny and Susannah, who spend at least a day a week hitting the high street to find the best buys.

It's a bit frustrating to find you can't order that perfect coat immediately online, however Trinny points out that 60 per cent of Internet users don't buy online, instead they use the Internet to browse and then they hit the high street. Online retailing will be catered for in the future, "when there are enough good retailers online then we'll bring them to the site in little boutiques. But for now it's purely pointing them at the high street," explains Woodall.

Navigation from the home page is simple and fun. It seems you're most likely to subscribe because you're tired of standing around in your pants

Woodall and Constantine have some grand plans - 15 advice channels by 2001. And they might just do it they've got some big money backing them. Cable & Wireless stumped up the initial development money (£600,000) and recently the company got a huge cash injection (£5 million) from two venture capital companies. This has allowed Ready2 to build up a reasonably sized team of 20 - all women. Woodall is convinced that they need a predominantly female staff, "if we want to give advice to women, it's got to come from other women."

Gail Robinson

READY2SHOP SCORES...

Design ★★★★☆

Content ★★★★☆

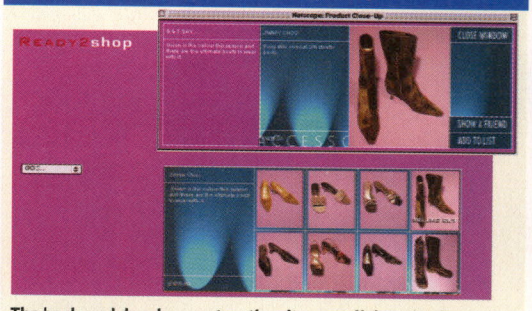
THREE FOR THE GIRLS

Handbag www.handbag.com

Charlotte Street www.charlottestreet.com

Circle www.icircle.co.uk

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?



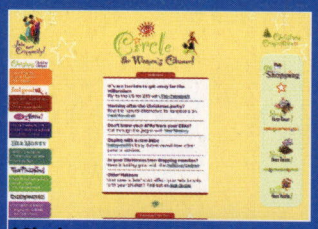
The back-end development on the site was all done by the Brighton-based Web development company Victoria Real. So how did they manage the huge quantity of products to be cross-referenced? The information is all held in an Oracle 8i database. Web server duties are carried out by Oracle Application Server and the middleware is hand-written in Perl. Rob Love, joint MD at Victoria Real, explains how the Match2Me feature works. "Susannah and Trinny have classified the clothes in the database according to suitability for different body shapes," he explains. "When the user hits Match2Me, the information she's entered about her body is compared with this classification and only the appropriate clothes are pulled out."

CLICK HERE

The new seekers

Latest addition to the rapidly-growing world of search engines is Voila from... you guessed it... France. Its thematic search option sets it apart from the rest. Voila crawls the Web, eliminating the extraneous. So far, it offers 20 thematic searches including ones for cities, including London, New York and San Francisco, and ones that deal with cult favourites such as *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *X-Files* and James Bond. Well worth a look, or even a bookmark.

www.voila.co.uk



iCircle p79

3D Total p82

Combat Online p83

FoodnDrink

www.foodndrink.co.uk

A new gastronomic site that serves up a satisfying mix for the pickiest of foodies

Despite the wealth of food and wine sites out there, there isn't one to suit all tastes. Foodndrink has set out to change that by providing something for everyone, whether you want to go out for a meal or stay in and cook.

Set up by restaurant critic Godfrey Bland, who was dissatisfied with other sites, Foodndrink was developed by Motion Pixels in three months and launched in November. In Bland's words, the site's aim is "to provide a definitive gastronomic resource" and it comes close to achieving this goal between its nine sections.

Cleanly designed and simple to navigate, Foodndrink offers online wine and food experts, a London Restaurant Guide, recipe suggestions, and links to online wine merchants such as Bibendum (**www.bibendum-wine.co.uk**). You'll also find details on your nearest cookery schools and salivating literary quotes from the likes of Trollope and Ian Fleming. Its graphics, generated by PHP3 scripts running on a UNIX server, are never overwhelming and let the site load quickly and smoothly.

One best things about the site is the way it involved visitors in its growth. As well as members' competitions and discussion groups, you can email restaurant reviews and recipes for inclusion.

More reviews will be needed, since although the London restaurant guide includes over 1,000 eateries searchable by area, cost and type of food, anyone familiar with their area will notice omissions.

With its club atmosphere and plans for online restaurant booking and overseas guides, Foodndrink is worth more than one visit. But don't be surprised if you come away hungry.

Mark Whitehead

From poached eggs to pizza delivery, Foodndrink aims to be a "definitive gastronomic resource"

FOODNDRINK SCORES...

Design ★★★★☆
Content ★★★☆☆

MAKING A MEAL OF IT

Restaurant Row www.restaurantrow.com
The Internet Chef www.ichef.com
Epicurious www.epicurious.com

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

To handle the quantity of information on the Foodndrink site, Motion Pixels chose a MySQL database, importing content from MS Access and HTML forms. "We chose MySQL because it's fast, easy to execute and administer, and has good integration with modern PHP tools," says Paul Baillie, Motion Pixel's creative director.

Personals 365

www.personals365.com

Good looking Web site with great SOH targets singles looking for luurve

Who wants to take the time to hang around pubs and nightclubs looking for Mr or Ms Right when you could sign up with Personals365 and be chatting with hordes of singles within minutes?

This lonely hearts/online meeting place is part of the 365 empire, which already has sports and music sites. So just how do you make the transition to romance? In truth, it's not such a big jump – 365's telecoms arm is already running phone dating services, and the online service was a natural progression.

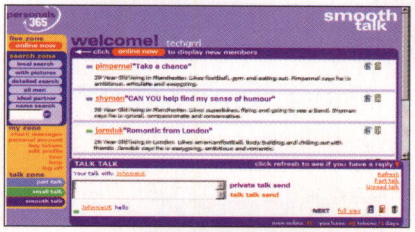
The site splits into three areas: Just Talk for making friends, Small Talk for casual fun and Smooth Talk for romance. Just choose which area you want to place your personal ad in, hand over your details, and the site will create the ad for you.

Personals365 has been running since November and things are already looking promising with over 30,000 sign-ups.

Personals365 is an advertising-free zone

Commercially, Personals365 is an interesting proposition. There are no banner ads on the site and there are no plans to introduce any. There's also no conventional monthly subscription fee. When you sign up you're given seven days completely free and 40 tokens. Tokens can be exchanged for the two paid-for components of the service – email conversations and real-time chat. Philpot elaborates: "We thought ads would be intrusive and we need to grow our critical mass of users. However we may consider getting the site sponsored in the future."

Gail Robinson



Check out the romantically-minded ads in Smooth Talk

PERSONALS 365 SCORES...

Design ★★★★☆
Content ★★★★☆

LOOKING FOR LOVE

Match.com www.match.com
Liv4now www.liv4now.com
A1 Romance www.a1romance.com

Unique Silver-Gold Alloy Technology Only from Kodak

KODAK CD-R Ultima

- Up to 6 times as durable as silver-only discs
- Better reliability for writing and reading first time
- With INFOGUARD Protection Coating

Contains Real Gold · Contains Real Gold · Contains Real Gold · REAL GOLD

1x~8x RECORDING SPEED

www.kodak.com/go/cdr

[Protects data from almost anything.]

Dixons JESSOPS PC WORLD THE COMPUTER SUPERSTORE TEMPO

© Eastman Kodak Company, 1999. Kodak and InfoGuard are trademarks of Eastman Kodak Company.

Hamleys

www.hamleys.com

The premium British toyshop relaunches its site with an emphasis on the exclusive

Hamleys seems to be having an identity crisis. The bastion of quality playthings has announced its intention to transform its Regent Street store from a tourist attraction into a toyshop for everyone. It's even having the first sale in its 200-year history. But its site is an entirely different story.

Online, Hamleys is all about tradition and quality. The site is only offering 150 of the store's 40,000 products for three-day gift-wrapped delivery to the EU and US, and the emphasis is clearly on collectibles and exclusives. Ask for a recommendation for a girl aged 7-10, and you're as likely to be offered a £75 Victorian-style bagatelle board as a Barbie.

"The site is all about the best quality toys," says John O'Sullivan, MD of the site's designers, Equire (**www.equire.com**). "Collectibles and exclusives are Hamleys' bestsellers." This, and the 'early stages' nature of the site explain some of its peculiarities. Hamleys is using the site's activity over Christmas to learn about what products and services its customers want. "It's just a start," says O'Sullivan. "Don't ever expect to see 10,000 toys on the site. Everybody else is doing that. We want the site's direction to be flexible."

So instead of big e-commerce, you're likely to see phase two offering the chance to source hard-to-get toys. Interactive games and a kids club are also likely. But Hamleys will wait and see what the customer wants. "A lot of people have strategies but no customer feedback," says O'Sullivan. "The Web is an ideal place to decide direction."

The site's design budget was around £250,000, and it's delivered a classy result, with good quality pictures of the toys and clear navigation. A couple of grumbles though – there's no non-Flash option, and the scrolling picture menus of toys across the top of each page don't scroll. You have to click repeatedly to get new toys onto your screen.

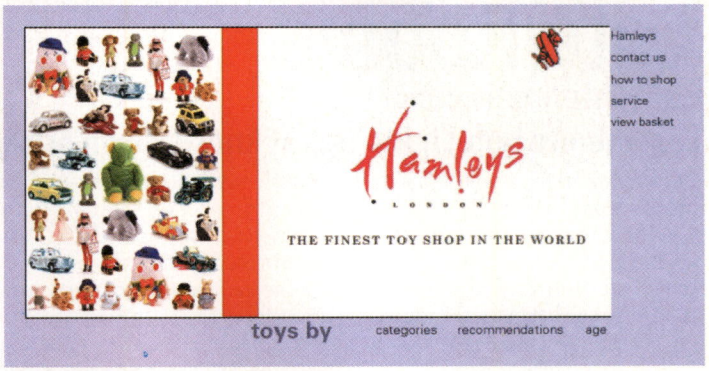
Hamleys also needs to do some fulfilment work. Two of its top five toys were out of stock, and in some sections up to a quarter of the toys were unavailable. But its consumer-response approach should fix this, and makes it one to watch.
Tanya Kreisky

HAMLEYS SCORES...

Design ★★★★☆
Content ★★★☆☆

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

Site designers, Equire, used Broadvision software for e-commerce on the site. As well as handling transactions, it lets you track customers' movements around the site. This will eventually lead to one to one marketing. "Broadvision lets you start customising the site to issue special offers. It's a major direct marketing tool," says John O'Sullivan, MD of Equire. "It's the online equivalent of the personal care you get from shop assistants at Hamleys."



The Hamleys home page is clean and navigation is clear. It's just a shame that there's no option for anyone who doesn't have a Flashed-up browser

MORE THAN A MERE BAGATELLE

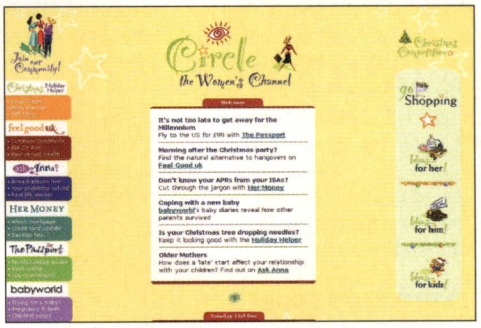
Toyzone www.toyzone.co.uk
Corgi Collectibles www.corgi.co.uk
Hasbro www.hasbro.com

iCircle

www.icircle.com

The UK's biggest ISP gets into the site business in a big way

Commercial niche sites were big news last year, and plenty of them were aimed at the women's market. It seems this is set to continue with the launch of 'community channel' iCircle. But the difference here is that this is Freeserve's first site launch.

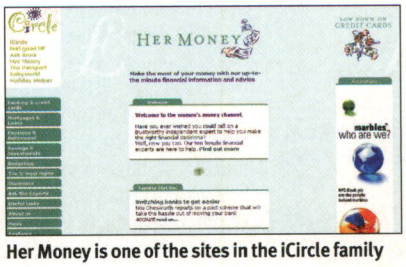


iCircle marks the arrival of Freeserve in the sites market

Freeserve decided to launch the site having discovered that 40 per cent of its users were women – a potential 600,000 visitors. The ISP had also just bought a site called Babyworld (**www.babyworld.co.uk**) and asked its editor, Anita Bevan to become editor-in-chief at iCircle.

The decision was made to launch individual sites that could not only feed into iCircle, but into the main Freeserve portal as well. "We are grown-up in our approach. We are not an e-zine with sections," says Bevan. "We act as an umbrella to the other sites."

There are five of these sites, each with its own domain and production team. Babyworld was the first to be linked to iCircle, followed by finance site Her Money (**www.hermoney.co.uk**), The Passport (**www.thepassport.co.uk**) travel site, the Feelgood UK health site (**www.feelgooduk.co.uk**) and Ask Anna (**www.askanna.co.uk**) a relationships site fronted by agony aunt Anna Raeburn.



Her Money is one of the sites in the iCircle family

Over Christmas, the iCircle also added a shopping mall, called Holiday Helper. This is an occasional offering, and will be available again at half term. The site follows the recent trend of understating e-commerce in favour of attempting to build trust with visitors.

The sites were all launched in an amazing eight weeks from conception to launch. "Freeserve really wanted to get them up and running in its first year," Bevan says. The site already has chat and the popular discussion boards, but there's more to come. "We'll be adding entertainment and humour later in 2000," says Bevan. All this is estimated to have cost Freeserve a six figure sum.

Since each site has its own bespoke content, there's much to recommend the network, and that's without considering the simple design delivered by Zest, which was also responsible for the sites' content management system. Its simple design plus good, clear content equal a future for iCircle that looks particularly rosy.
Richard Dinnick

ICIRCLE SCORES...

Design ★★★★☆
Content ★★★★☆

WOMEN ONLY

Handbag www.handbag.com
Connect Women www.connectwomen.com
Woman.com www.woman.com

Late Rooms

www.laterooms.com

Last minute hotel bookings at knock-down prices

LateRooms.com has just been launched to compete with Lastminute.com and to help hotels get rid of their empty rooms by discounting their prices. Before this site, there was no easy way for hotels to advertise their unused rooms at reduced rates. Now hotel staff can log on and change the room rate in a couple of minutes, giving you the chance to get a four star room for the price of a one star, and giving hoteliers the power to fill their rooms at prices they can control. The later you leave it, the cheaper they get.

"The site harnesses the best of new and old technology," says Steve Walsh, senior partner at e-commerce agency Walsh Simmons. The customer interface is incredibly simple, with the sexy bit behind the scenes in the form of a tailor-made back-end with a rolling calendar that can take hotels' details up to three months in advance.

The hotels can plan ahead and discount beds during quiet periods, drop their prices in an instant, or withdraw the whole lot if business starts booming. As hotels use different reservation-system software, you can't book online, but in a recent survey, 92 per cent of Net users said they'd prefer to make payments and confirm final details by phone. Chris Allen, Director of LateRooms.com agrees: "Customers can find a cheap room on the site and have the a human voice confirm that their bed will be waiting for them."

To find a room, just type in where you want to go and use a pull-down calendar to say when you want to stay there. I tried to find a weekend in Brighton and was offered rooms in Crawley and Bognor Regis. Close but no cigar. However, if I was after a Monday night away instead, I could have had a room at The Grand for £40 instead of £210. Now that's much more like it.

Katherine Harvey

Late Rooms offers huge discounts, but no online booking service

LATE ROOMS SCORES

Design ★★★☆☆
Content ★★★★☆

ONE NIGHT STAND

LastMinute.com www.lastminute.com
E-bookers www.e-bookers.com
Minibreaks.com www.minibreaks.com

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

The site uses the Hypertext processor, PHP, to generate the pages. The site's look and logo give it the feel of a family-run B&B. But behind this is a cutting edge SQL database with a 2Mb input line giving hoteliers instant access to their details. "The hotels can display discounts and standard rates and alter prices as occupancy changes," explains Allen.

The Week

www.theweek.co.uk

Catch up on the best of the week's news and reviews

The Week, was launched in 1995 as a digest of current affairs, reviews and articles from UK newspaper and magazines. With 50,000 subscribers, the news magazine has launched itself online courtesy of Dennis Interactive and was the brainchild of chairman Felix Dennis.

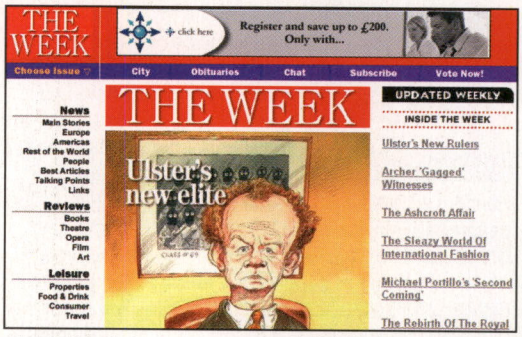
This is a major launch for the company, which holds a majority share in the magazine, and the idea is to generate a wider international audience and create an archive available to everyone. "We are currently talking with Netscape about a mini edition," says Guy Sneesby, managing director of Dennis Interactive.

The site will join a long list of popular online publications from Dennis, including PC Pro and Maxim. But the hope is that *The Week* will become one its most popular online publications. "We hope to have two million [impressions] by March," says Sneesby.

Although balanced by the reasonable site structure, the layout of individual pages isn't great. No less than 10 framed windows make up each page, with the centre frame holding most of the relevant content, making the amount of readable text relatively small.

The overuse of frames also makes the site slow, and it can take several refreshes before you can see all the content. But frame frenzy aside, there is a consistent structure and the site is easy to navigate.

The Week Online took six months to develop and six weeks to launch. The bulk of the site is plain HTML with a little JavaScript and a CGI bin to take care of forms. No 'off the shelf solutions' were used and all database interaction was coded in-house. Site structure is similar to other Dennis offerings, with strong colours and defined 'areas of interest' on the page.



The Week is the latest online offering from publishers Dennis

As a first time user, you're greeted with a form asking you to give some details and enter a username. This results in customised emails, promotions and special offers. Future improvements to the site will include the addition of a day by day publication. And guess what that bit will be called? *The Day*.

James Bavington

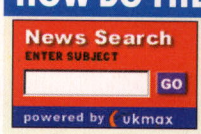
THE WEEK SCORES...

Design ★★☆☆☆
Content ★★★★☆

HEADLINE HUNTING

The Times Online www.news.co.uk
The Independent Online www.independent.co.uk
Electronic Telegraph www.telegraph.co.uk

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?



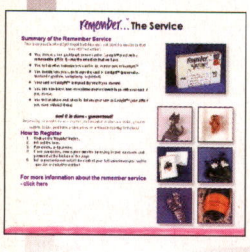
The Week online has a news search facility embedded in its pages, provided by UK search engine, Ukmax. Within the HTML code is a form containing a query set to the Ukmax homepage. When you type a word into the search box and hit 'go', the code queries the active server pages (ASP) on the Ukmax site, and returns a list of answers from its database. Anyone can put this type of search facility on their site. Take a look at www.search-engines.net.

CLICK HERE

We can remember it for you wholesale

With most New Year's resolutions well and truly broken by now, why not resolve never to forget another important date? RememberOnline offers to take a note of all those birthdays and anniversaries, and send a card, e-card, or even a present for you. The printed cards are top quality, and you can even upload a scanned signature to add that touch of authenticity.

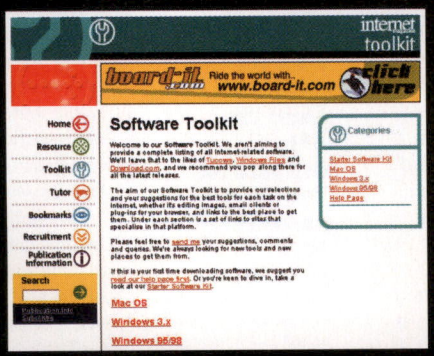
www.rememberonline.co.uk

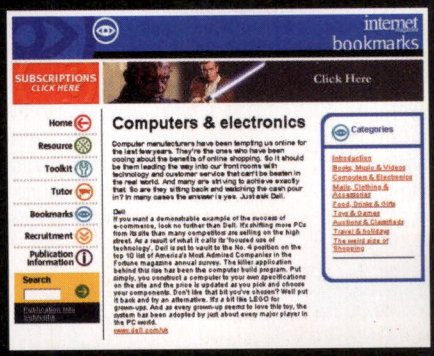


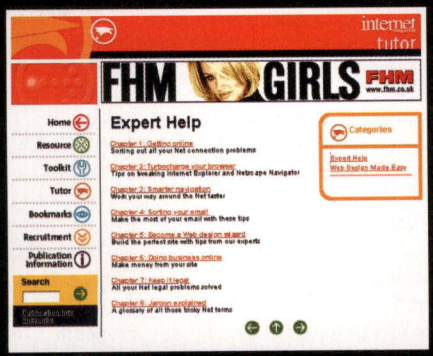
internet magazine online

- **Home** Latest news, our news archive and what's in the magazine
- **Tutor** Expert Help questions and answers, Web design tips and tricks
- **Recruitment** How to advertise and apply for a job online as well as the best recruitment sites
- **Resource** The ISP listings, Tried & Tested product reviews, cybercafés guide
- **Toolkit** The very best Internet software
- **Bookmarks** This month's essential viewing, the best sites for shopping and every aspect of life on the Net

And a whole lot more...







www.internet-magazine.com

HomeImprovement

Each month **Richard Dinnick** and a team of professional Web designers rate and review readers' home pages. Submit your site to **richardd@internet.emap.com**

3D Total

A great-looking 3D artwork site packed with images, advice, downloads and tutorials

TEXT COLOUR
Black text on a blue background is difficult to read and even worse to print. As a general rule, text and background colours should really contrast – make one dark and the other light.

BANNER ADS
If you want to sell ads on your site, the best way to start is to give the space away free. Other potential advertisers will then see that a banner ad on your site is worth paying money for. It also gives you time to build up traffic.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION
If one part of a site hasn't been finished yet, don't advertise the fact. 'Under construction' signs or 'coming soon' messages are frustrating and it's far better to work on the area or service secretly and announce it once it's ready.

NAVIGATION
A key point in Web design and crucial to the success of a site. The navigation on 3D Total is tricky. Get a friend to try the site and see what they think.

ONLINE TRANSACTIONS
If you want to offer items for sale on your site, it's not good enough to get people to email you. It's not secure and you'll need to invest in something more substantial or resort to cheques through the post.

From the moment you see the doormat page of 3D Total, you know this is going to be a cool site. And it doesn't disappoint, particularly if you're interested in creating 3D images from two-dimensional pictures. Tom's site is dedicated to helping computer graphics artists all over the world by providing libraries, news and advice on the subject. He's even put together a compilation CD of 3D textures, meshes and backgrounds, which is for sale on the site.

On the second page you're presented with the latest highlights from the 14 3D models and five artwork galleries. The curved navigation panels at the top and left of the page give the impression that this site uses frames, but the 26 year old MA student and part-time lecturer knows better than that. The design's simple with consistent navigation – which is vital for all good sites. The content's never more than three or four clicks away and it's all relevant.

Unless you know about 3D rendering, you'll want to know more about what a computer graphics artist does and the tools used in the job. Software such as Lightwave 3D and Truespace is mentioned, but it's not explained. It's a minor quibble, since the site is aimed at those who know a thing or two about 3D rendering and design.

Tom admits his site was partly influenced by 3D Café – the self-proclaimed 'ultimate resource for computer graphics artists' (**www.3dcafe.com**). Tom's site might not be the ultimate resource for computer graphics artists, but there's a lot to recommend it. You can look at all the artwork submitted by fellow artists and download meshes and textures. There are even tutorials to improve your skills in areas such as animated lighting, billowing smoke, bubbles and rotation.

Tom put his site together using the Web designer's favourite – Macromedia Dreamweaver – and spends about 15 hours a week keeping it up to date by adding new images and sections, as well as detailing the updates in the news section. This attention to detail has attracted over 64,000 visitors since the site went live in August 1999.

Tom originally envisaged the site helping him to pay for his MA, but making your fortune online is a tricky business. "It hasn't made a bean as yet," he confesses. This might account for Tom's description of his relationship with the Net is understated. "It's better than watching TV," he says. "But it's not as good as surfing the real waves on the south coast."

SITE SPEC

www.3dttotal.com

CREATED BY
Tom Greenway

LAUNCH DATE
August 1999

CURRENT SIZE
45 Mb

DEVELOPMENT TIME
Three weeks

NUMBER OF PAGES
242

MOTIVATION
"I wanted to try Web design as my time had been taken up with 3D animation and I wanted to provide a service to give other 3D computer artists more exposure."

WHAT NEXT?
"Hopefully, I'll have created a texture CD and possible a 3D studio max training CD that I can sell – sponsors would be nice, too."

TRADE SECRETS

Daryn Foster
MD flg21
www.flg21.com

3D Total has some great 3D content, but it needs to pay more attention to the site's technical aspects. All the images should have ALT tags, as some people have the latest browsers with the graphics turned off for quick access. Consistent use of fonts also helps. CSS could be used to obtain this. Tom also shouldn't rely on <P> </P> to pad-out columns to exact heights. The height of these paragraphs will be different in different browsers. Use invisible GIFs instead.

3D TOTAL SCORES...

Design ★★★★☆
Content ★★★☆☆

TOM RECOMMENDS

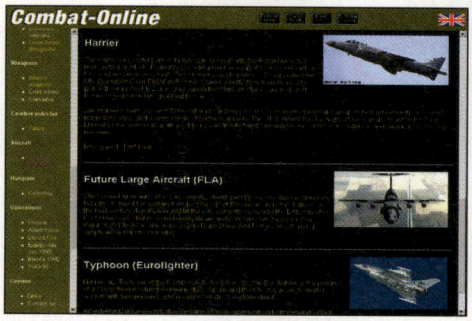
3D café
www.3dcafe.com
3dark
www.3dark.com
Pixar
www.pixar.com

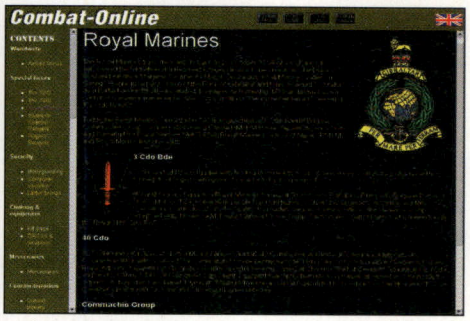
Combat Online

A military portal that's got the potential to be the best, and some great pictures of tanks too...

FRAMES
If you must use frames, you should also create a no frames version. In the case of Combat Online, it might be a good idea to turn the 'Stand by, Stand by' splash page into a gateway to either the frames and no frames version.

THUMBNAILS
If you have a lot of photos on your site, keep them small, as here, so they don't take an age to download. But it'd be even better to use thumbnails of the photos on the site. This gives visitors the option of viewing them in a larger format of they want to. If copyright's a concern, you can choose from a number of electronic watermarks.





THE LAW OF IMAGES
For the most part, this site is an excellent example of what designers should be do for visitors with their images switched off. But you must add ALT tags to so people can decide whether to view the image.

COLOUR USED LINKS
Let visitors know where they've already been on your site. The best way to do this is to give used links a different colour. The value of this exercise is lost when the colour for visited links is unreadable against the background colour of the site. Here we have dark purple on a drab olive background.

With its colour combination of drab olive, sandy yellow and black, this site could only be about the military. From the moment you get the 'Stand by! Stand By!' message on the splash page, anyone who's served in the forces or who takes an interest in things military will know they're faced with a site from someone who knows what he's doing.

James Marchington hasn't been in the army, but he's edited a number of military magazines, including *Combat & Militaria* and *Gun Mart*. But this isn't just a site for nutters who wander around Dartmoor in camouflage gear.

James takes a serious approach to his subject, providing a regularly updated news briefing called Incoming, as well as making good use of the free content on offer from the Guardian's News Unlimited section (**www.news unlimited.co.uk**).

There are links to Amazon so that you can buy military books, as well as helpful links to the International Association for Counter-terrorism and Security Professionals (IACSP), a Global Intelligence hotspot map and – in case you need to check any other maps – the ever-useful MultiMap. This is a good collection, but James might consider adding a link to the CIA World Factbook (**www.cia.gov/cia/publications /factbook/index.html**) to add an extra dimension.

James handles the portal duties of the site well, providing a list of 50 links to the world's armed forces, as well as bespoke content on Special Forces regiments and detachments, such as the SAS and SBS. James could augment this section by adding little-known groups such as Pathfinder Group in the Parachute Regiment as well as those from abroad – such as the Navy Seals or Delta Force in the US (yes, you've guessed it, it's the pet topic of a certain *Internet Magazine* writer).

The rest of the site covers other aspects of militaria, from camouflage to survival tips, all of which are well researched. As you progress down the framed navigation bar, areas dealing with firearms, tanks and combat aircraft only skim the surface of these topics, but the items detailed are at least accompanied by pictures.

James created the site by writing straight HTML and editing this using BBEdit. For his extensive photographic collection he uses Photoshop 4 and Graphic Converter. He says he couldn't manage the site without the help of Phil Caloe at Pacific Point (**www.pacific-point.com**). "He hosts the site on his server and has provided much help and encouragement," says James.

With a bit more effort, James' site could be one of the best military portals on the Web. The 42 year old journalist has made a reasonable stab at providing a portal for army enthusiasts, attracting 23,561 visitors. This is not surprising, given that that he's on something of a mission. "I looked at the huge amount of dross out there and thought 'I can do better than that'," he says. That's one of the best reasons to build a Web site, and James has fulfilled his ambition.

TRADE SECRETS

Richard Dinnick
site reviews editor
Internet Magazine
www.richardd@internet.emap.com

Two of the main design faults on the Web are the use of frames and an inconsistent, unintuitive navigation system. Combat Online commits the first sin unnecessarily, as the site doesn't make use of secondary navigation. Remember that it's not always necessary to get a link to every page of a site on the first page. James should consider using his section titles – such as Worldwide, Special Forces and Security – as the main navigation buttons. Visitors could then click on a link and be presented with a brief description of the aims of that area, along with a second-level navigation panel of the pages within the section. This would remove the need for frames and still obey the rule of taking no more than three clicks to get to any piece on information on the site.

SITE SPEC

www.combat-online.com

CREATED BY
James Marchington

LAUNCH DATE
August 1998

CURRENT SIZE
7.2Mb

DEVELOPMENT TIME
Around one month

NUMBER OF PAGES
Around 60

MOTIVATION
"I wanted to learn about the Web. I had a lot of the material, such as photos, lying around from the magazine I used to edit. It took on a life of its own, driven by the interest and enthusiasm of readers around the world."

WHAT NEXT?
"I'm working on making it commercial. I already have associate links with Amazon and I'm putting together a rate card to sell advertising. I hope to sell services such as POP3 email to our regular visitors. Maybe one day we can sort out a regular paid-for newsletter (possibly in Acrobat format distributed via email), but that's some way off yet."

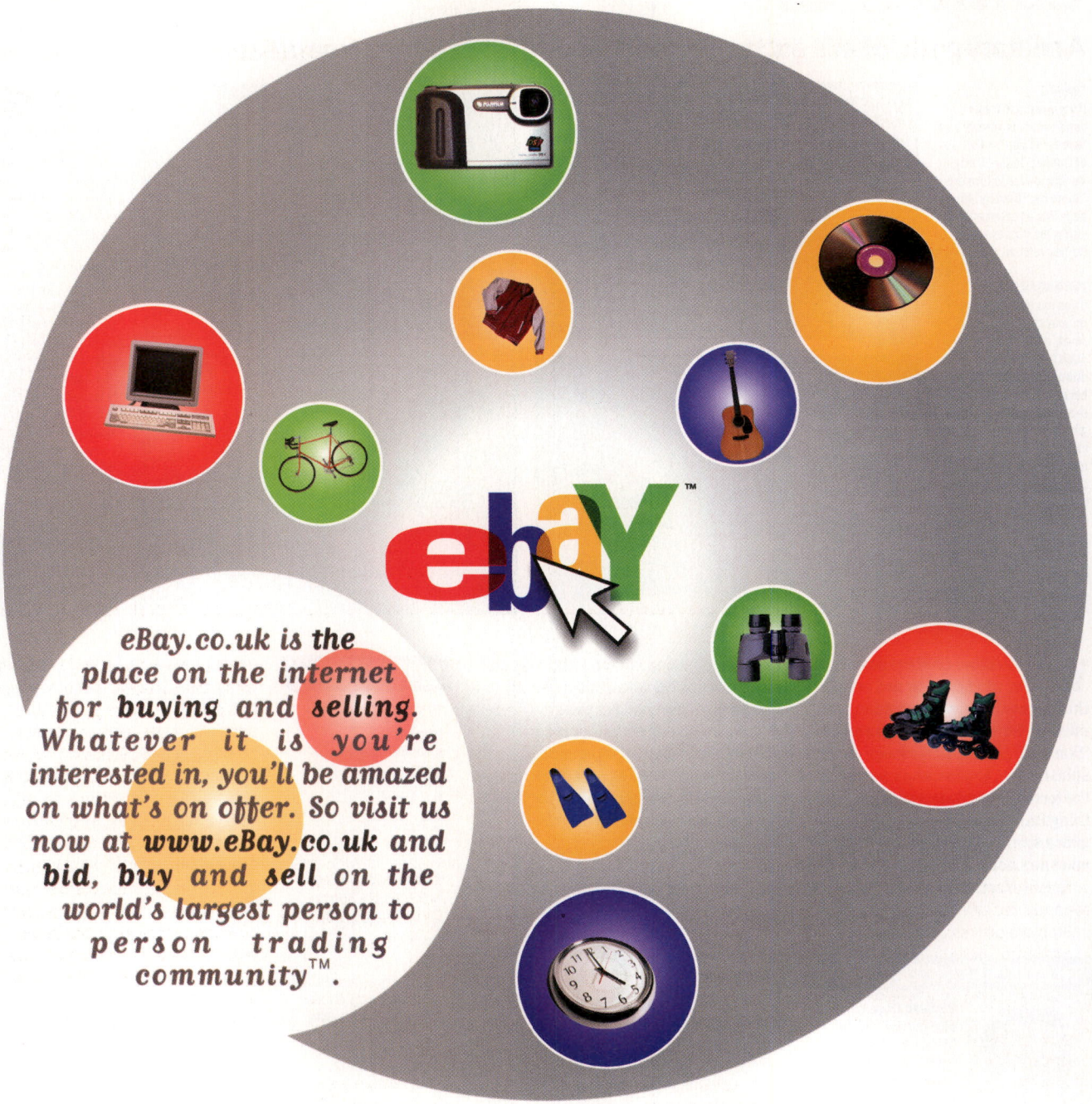
COMBAT ONLINE SCORES...

Design ★★☆☆☆
Content ★★★☆☆

JAMESRECOMMENDS

Open.gov
www.open.gov.uk
192.com
www.192.com/search.htm
Blackhawk Industries
www.blackhawkindustries.com

Get more than you bargained for!



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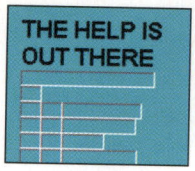
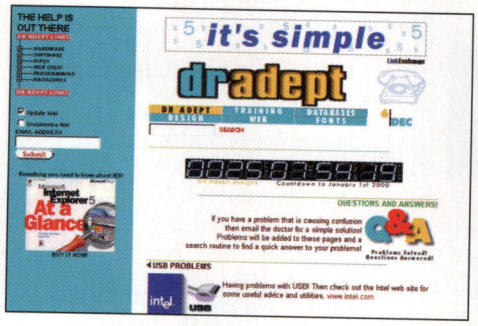
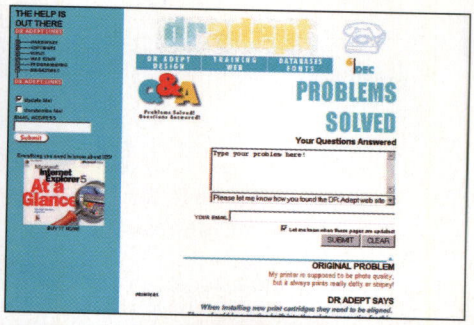
Dr Adept

A computer advice and online consultancy site bordering on the professional

IMAGES FOR NAVIGATION
For some reason, this site uses text images in its nested navigation frame. This is useless if people have images switched off in their browser.

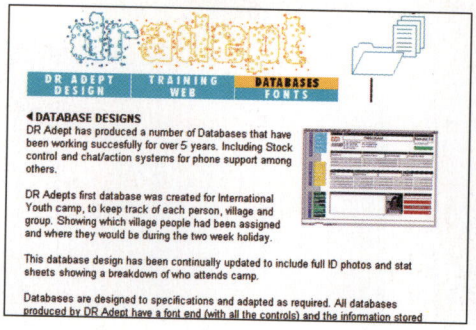




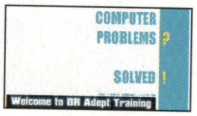


CROSS-BROWSER COMPATIBILITY
Make sure everyone can see your site, no matter what browser they're using. Ideally, your site should cope with anything from Mosaic to IE5, but it'd be a start to make it work with Explorer and Netscape.

DEAD LINKS
If you've removed a section or not uploaded it yet, don't advertise it on the site. It'll frustrate people and drive them elsewhere. If the link isn't meant to be a link at all, don't make it look like one.



SPLASH PAGE
Also known as a doormat page, this can act as a nice introduction to your site. The Dr Adept splash page works well because it's simple and takes you through to the main site in the time it takes you to read the message. Don't make splash pages too complicated or long. Visitors won't wait.



The professionalism of this site almost pushed it over the border that separates Home Improvement from the professional area of Site Surveyor. It's a home page, but its design is polished, its content is hugely useful, and it sells that information from the site. David Radisic's site is in Home Improvement because it illustrates the boundaries of this section – it's an excellent example of what can go wrong, even on a slick Web site like this.

The Dr Adept site kicks off with an exemplary opening page claiming that it will solve your computer problems. Within seconds, you're automatically taken through to the main page, where you're presented with plenty of information. The Q&A section lists previously asked questions – with their answers – and offers a submission form for your own queries, but the site doesn't tell you how long you'll have to wait for an answer. It's a good service nonetheless and, unbelievably, it's free.

The left-hand panel – where you might expect to find the main navigation panel – is kept free for David's hugely useful selection of links. Despite being held within a frame, this excellent resource has links to all the major computer hardware and software manufacturers, computer-related magazines (including *Internet Magazine*) and virus specialists.

The main navigation is contained within a simple, banner-shaped bar at the top of the page. This accesses six sections – Design, Training, Web, Databases, Fonts and the Dr Adept home page. This is where the message of the site becomes muddied. While a large part of the home page is dedicated to promoting the 34 year old computer consultant's Web design skills, the Design section deals with print shop material, such as leaflets, business cards and photograph retouching.

The number of services David offers from his site compounds the confusion. The Fonts section deals with different font styles, as well as how Dr Adept can design you a font to suit your purpose. The Databases area details some of David's work in this field and asks you for an email address or phone number so he can contact you to discuss your database needs. It would be nice to see some examples, but this is a small point.

The Guides section has only one tutorial at the moment, but the site is seeking to broaden this resource. David's selling guides to various computer problems for between £5 and £19, but you can't buy them online. The site also offers training courses, for which you can request information. Why? Surely the training course details should be online, accompanied by a booking form. This seems a needlessly clumsy attempt at capturing data.

The Dr Adept site is a good stab at an online consultancy, with some genuinely useful sections – particularly that list of links. Maybe David should leave the extraneous print-related material to the likes of Kall Kwik (**www.kallkwik.co.uk**) and concentrate on his core competencies, such as the computer-related details of tutorials, guides, training course and database design.

TRADE SECRETS

Margaret Manning
commercial director
Reading Room
www.readingroom.com

This Web site was obviously designed to be used with Internet Explorer. When it's viewed in Netscape, the blue side panel suddenly appears on an ungainly white background. The HTML code sets the left margin and top margin of this panel to equal zero. Unfortunately, not all Netscape browsers recognise this code. Adding MARGINWIDTH="0" MARGINHEIGHT="0" would solve this problem in browsers earlier than Netscape 4.6. A lot of care and attention has gone into sourcing hundreds of links to computer-related sites. These could be improved by adding links to review sites, as well as to the manufacturers' sites. But I'll probably use the site in future to find site addresses, as I have rarely come across a more comprehensive list.

SITE SPEC

www.dradept.co.uk

CREATED BY
David Radisic

LAUNCH DATE
March 1999

CURRENT SIZE
1.4Mb

DEVELOPMENT TIME
"Three weeks for the initial design and then about a month for each update."

NUMBER OF PAGES
67

MOTIVATION
"It was the first step on the road to running my own business."

WHAT NEXT?
"My original idea was to develop a search engine dedicated to help and advice for computer problems. I'd like to pursue this and produce an advice and information Web site with a search engine facility."

DR ADEPT SCORES...

Design ★★★☆☆
Content ★★☆☆☆

DAVID RECOMMENDS

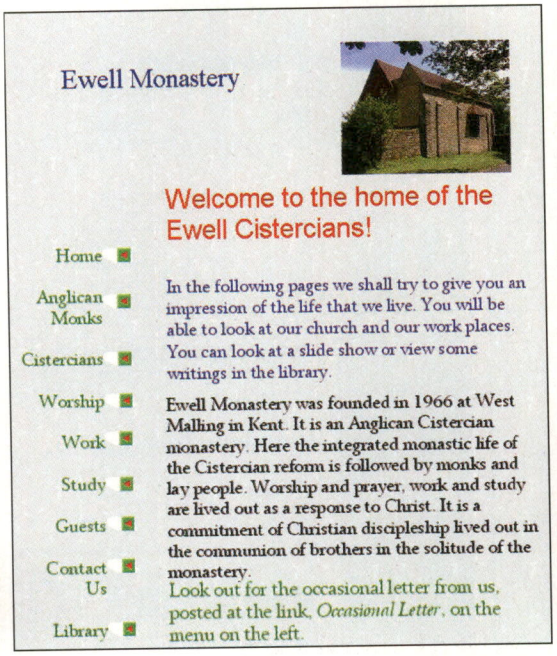
Web Monkey
www.webmonkey.com
Ask.com
www.ask.com
Jungle.com
www.jungle.com

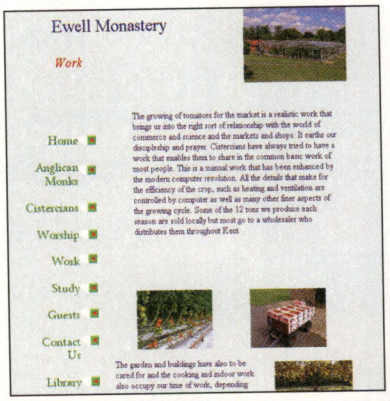
Ewell Monastry

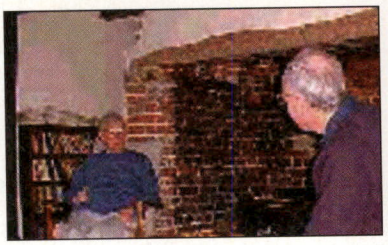
Monks don't have a lot of spare time, but Brother Aelred's used his to create an excellent site

TEXT COLOUR
Avoid using too many colours for text on one page. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should. As for bright blue text, people will associate this colour with hyperlinks and they'll be confused when they don't work.

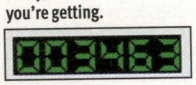
TEXT AND BACKGROUNDS AS IMAGES
If your site uses an image for a background, make sure the text colour works with the black or white default that browsers set when images are switched off. This site's home page uses text as image files, so with images switched off in your browser, you'll only see a black background with a some image boxes.







COUNTERS
Particularly when your visitor numbers are low – as here – you should hide your hit counter. It's embarrassing if you've only had a handful of visitors. You might have only just launched your site, and you're already putting people off by making your site look like it's unpopular. Hide your hit counter behind the scenes so you know how many, or how few, visitors you're getting.



ANIMATED GIFS
If you want to include multimedia on your site, animated GIFs work particularly well. Ewell Monastery uses photos of its setting, rather than Ipix or video, to give visitors an idea of what it's like to live in the monastery.

There have been some good examples of the church embracing the Internet and its technologies over the past year, including the excellent sites for the Parkminster Monastery (www.parkminster.org.uk), St Michael's Abbey (www.farnboroughabbey.org) and the Vatican (www.vatican.va).

All of them went to professional design agencies to create their sites. But the Ewell Monastery site was put together by brother Aelred Arnesen, who is responsible for the monastery's administration, as well as cooking and helping to grow tomatoes. And this site was definitely not influenced by its flashier counterparts.

Brother Aelred uses the home page to tell you what to can expect from the monastic Web site, with 11 areas covering every aspect of life at Ewell. The home page acts as a guide to the monastery itself, dealing with its history (surprisingly short as it was only founded in 1966), and showing you around using an ingenious slide show of photographs that shouldn't strain even the slowest modem.

Two general sections tell you about the formation and rise of the Anglican order, as well as the Cistercian order to which the monks belong.

The site then breaks down into eight areas that take an in-depth look at life at Ewell Monastery. This study begins with the worship that the monks carry out, starting at 4.30am with vigils and ending at 7.45pm with Compline, after which the monks retire to bed.

As well as areas covering contacts, study and an occasional letter, there's also a section dealing with guests. Ewell Monastery has a guest house where you can stay for up to five days, sharing in the monastery's worship and work. The monk's work certainly seems to come next in importance after worship. And it's not just weeding a garden – the Ewell monks take their tomato growing very seriously. As the site says: "The growing of tomatoes for the market is a realistic work that brings us into the right sort of relationship with the world of commerce and science".

TRADE SECRETS

Mellisa Ogden
Web developer
Zymo Creations
www.zymocreations.com

I found the table layout a little disorganized. Technically speaking, the menu bar doesn't need to be an image map. Not only is it a sizeable image that takes time to download, but if Brother Aelred ever wants to add rollovers to the menu, that entire graphic would have to preload as each rollover image. Also, some browsers have problems understanding browser window commands when they're linked from an image map. Once again, it limits future page additions. Separating each menu item into individual graphics would let the menu items be placed closer together, which helps eliminate the need for so much scrolling.

SITE SPEC

http://home.clara.net/ewell/index.html

CREATED BY
Aelred Arnesen

LAUNCH DATE
October 1998

CURRENT SIZE
14 Mb

DEVELOPMENT TIME
One month

NUMBER OF PAGES
19

MOTIVATION
"We needed a higher profile for our particular form of monastic life."

WHAT NEXT?
"We're pleased with its present shape. But we might think of attaching sound in the form of music and commentary when it becomes easier for people to download. At present, there's only one page with some sound on it. We'd like our own domain name, but having started with Web space at ClaraNet – which has become well known – it's difficult to see how we can make the change. It'd cost more and we don't want people to lose us."

And it's no mean boast – the Ewell tomato greenhouses use computer controlled heating and ventilation systems and produce 12 tons of tomatoes every year. The Web site has allowed brother Aelred to set up a worldwide network of tomato growers who communicate by email. "We get emails from all sorts of amateur growers, from Alaska to Hong Kong and Manila," he explains. "We even had one request from America that asked about the statistical differences between soil and hydroponic growing for a science project."

This small but perfectly formed site was put together using Serif PagePlus, plus Arachnofilia for tweaking the code. Due to his other chores, the 74 year old monk can only spend about half an hour a week updating the site. His hard work has attracted 3,500 visitors so far. Brother Aelred finds the Net "an extremely useful resource for information" but says he has "no time to waste browsing!" Perhaps the amount of visitors to this site shows that he's attracting like-minded people.

EWELL MONASTRY SCORES...

Design ★★★☆☆
Content ★★★★☆

BROTHER AELRED RECOMMENDS

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www.amazon.co.uk
DABS Direct Online
www.dabs.com
Watford's Web Offers
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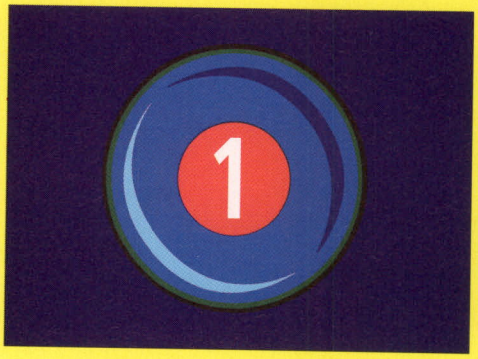

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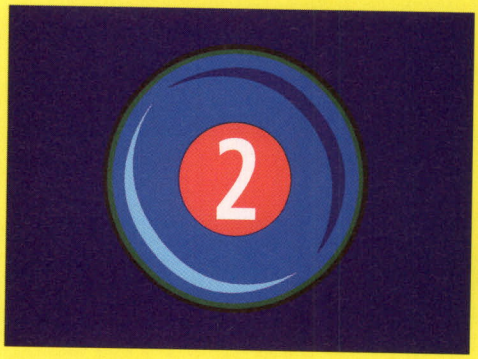

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- 20mb of commercial web space
- 20 International POP3 mail accounts
- Weekly website visitor statistics
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Readers' questions are answered by our panel of experts. Send your query to faq@internet.emap.com

Richard Baguley is our associate editor. He'll answer your technical questions on everything from relational databases to digital signatures.

Mike Slocombe has designed sites for clients that include *TFI Friday*, Virgin Radio, the BBC and NCR. He also produces Urban75, an irreverent online magazine. Mike will answer all your Web design queries.

Roger Gann is a freelance computer journalist. If you're having trouble with dial-up networking or your 56K modem isn't talking to your ISP, he's your man.

Michael Chissick is the head of Internet and IT law at Field Fisher Waterhouse. He'll be ruling on your legal problems.

Susan Costello is development director at Rufus Leonard, a brand and communications consultancy responsible for Web sites for Lloyds TSB, Royal Mail, and BT. She'll answer your technical Web site queries.

Andrew Starling is our technology editor. He'll deal with site creation and telecoms queries.

We regret that we cannot answer any queries other than those printed in the magazine.

In a Real time warp

Q I downloaded Real Jukebox onto my PC, and it came attached to RealPlayer 7 beta. It seemed OK at the time and sat quite happily in my taskbar tray. But after I'd run the program, only once, I was caught in a time warp as my PC clock in the tray appeared to be going slow. I was late for a meeting because of it. It was losing 20 minutes an hour, though the system/bios clock wasn't affected. After I uninstalled it, after much ridicule from my colleagues, the correct time reappeared. I have a permanent connection to the Internet at work and all I can presume is Real Jukebox was using processor time trying to do something over the Net. This is scary. If you were on a dial-up connection, you wouldn't notice this until you had run up a larger bill than you'd thought. So if you have Real Jukebox running in your system tray, beware.
Stuart Mckenzie
s.mckenzie@stula.demon.co.uk

A Andrew Starling replies: I've had first-hand experience of this, Stuart. It appears to be caused by RealPlayer 7 beta, rather than by RealJukebox. What you mustn't do is load RealPlayer 7 and use it without rebooting first. It'll work if you don't reboot, but it'll play merry hell with your clock. The problem seems to go away after the first reboot.

RealPlayer 7 beta can put you in a time warp if you don't reboot after installation

If you've rebooted and reset the clock and you've still got a problem, I'd recommend uninstalling RealPlayer 7, then reinstalling it and rebooting straight away. That's assuming you want to keep RealPlayer 7, but I think it's worth a little trouble.

Hidden Identity

Q I've recently fitted a new hard drive, having carefully made a backup of all my files from the original hard drive using Microsoft Backup. After restoring the back-up, everything is in place except my old Outlook Express emails. I backed-up the original .dbx files and these are stored on my back-up disk under C:\Windows\Cookies. The files vary in size, from 59kb to 4300kb, so there definitely seems to be something there. But all new emails sent or received since installation of the new hard drive appear in C:\Windows\Application Data\Identities\{AAC5B2C0-A1D7-11D3-A312-E08763C72815}\Microsoft\Outlook Express. I've tried copying the files into the latter folder and, while they appear in Explorer in the new destination, they're nowhere to be seen in Outlook Express. I don't want to lose my old emails as I often refer to them, and I'm wondering whether you have any suggestions for retrieving them?
Janine Martin
janinemartin@findon.force9.co.uk

A Roger Gann replies: You're right, Janine, Outlook Express 5 stores its email and newsgroup data in a number of files with the .dbx suffix, such as inbox.dbx. They'd normally reside in an Identities sub-folder. I suspect the reason that simple copying hasn't worked is because the files don't have the correct identity – a new identity was probably created when you reinstalled Windows 98, and this is different from the original. Identities is a new feature of Outlook Express, and lets different members of a family, for instance, access their email from one PC while ensuring a degree of privacy.

This discrepancy in Identities is probably behind the non-recognition of these data files. I'd suggest the solution to your

problem isn't to simply copy the data files to the desired location, but to import them. To do this, open Outlook Express and click File, Import. Select Messages from the drop-down list and select Outlook Express 5. You're then taken through the process by a wizard. Select 'Import mail from an OE5 Store Directory' and go to the folder containing your .dbx files.

Getting rid of branding

Q I'm new to the Internet and I'm experiencing a few problems with ISPs and Internet Explorer. My PC came with IE, but when I installed the Freeserve CD, IE and Outlook Express had been transformed into customised versions of Freeserve.

I want to retrieve the original versions of these programs and cut all links with Freeserve, but I'm having trouble doing this. I don't seem to have the option to uninstall Explorer and replace it with an uncustomised version. Do most ISPs provide their software in a similar fashion? I'd like to avoid the possibility of this happening again with my next ISP. I'll probably base my next choice of ISP on your top 30 ISP chart (December 1999), which was extremely useful.

David Pilgrim
DaveRPilgrim @aol.com

A Roger Gann replies: This branding of Internet Explorer is common and most ISPs will rebrand any installations of Internet Explorer and Outlook Express. Your desire for an uncustomised Internet Explorer could be a forlorn hope I'm afraid, David, as you can't prevent the process of this customisation. The branding is ultimately just eye candy and doesn't interfere with the operation of the software, so it's quite safe to leave it there and try to ignore it.

But if you do want to expunge every last trace of Freeserve, here's how to do it. To change the default ISP connection used by IE5, click Tools, then Internet Options and select the Connection tab. Scroll down the Dial-up Settings list, select Freeserve and click the Remove button. The connection settings of Outlook Express 5 are the same as IE5, so this change will affect Outlook as well.

You can simply delete the Freeserve icon from your desktop, and the icon itself (freeserve.ico) can be deleted from the directory C:\Windows. You can remove Freeserve entries in the Start menu from the following directory in Windows Explorer: C:\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Freeserve. To remove the Freeserve branding from Internet Explorer, you can delete the directory called \Signup in C:\Program Files\Internet Explorer. If you just want to delete the toolbar background 'motif', locate the file named toolbar.bmp in this directory and delete only that file.

The final step is to remove the customisations that Freeserve makes to IE4 and Outlook Express. This requires you to launch RegEdit to edit the Registry, which can be extremely detrimental to the health of Windows 9x if you make a mistake, so if you're feeling a little tentative, skip the next bit. To modify the title of Internet Explorer, launch RegEdit and drill down to this key:
HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\MICROSOFT\INTERNET EXPLORER\MAIN

Right click on Window Title to edit. To modify the title of Outlook Express, perform the same Registry hack, this time at:
HKEY_CURRENT_USER\SOFTWARE\MICROSOFT\OUTLOOK EXPRESS

Right click on Window Title to edit. To remove the 'Infopane' at the bottom of Outlook Express, you simply remove the BodyBarPath key in the same section as above.

Top reader's tip wins £200 voucher

I wanted to find out more about ASP, as featured in the November edition of *Internet Magazine*. But I didn't want to spend hours trying to download over 30Mb of Personal Web Server (PWS) files for my Windows 98 system from a Microsoft site in the US.

I spent a while looking on my Windows 98 Upgrade CD-ROM, and found it in the folder D:\add-ons\pws. I'd tried to install PWS from Settings/Add Programs/Windows Setup, and ended up installing just a couple of small auxiliary files which were of no practical benefit. But running the setup.exe program from the above folder had the desired effect, without frayed nerves or an unwelcome impact on the phone bill.

Keith Penton
keith@greystoke.cix.co.uk

As you've probably guessed, Keith, all of us here at *Internet Magazine* have shares in BT and we just love it when you run up huge phone bills downloading big files from the US on our recommendation. Not really! You've found an easy way of getting hold of Personal Web Server files. Thanks for the tip. If you spot any other shortcuts we've missed, let us know.

Keith wins himself a £200 shopping spree at top audio-visual online shopping Web site Unbeatable. With over 2,500 products available for your perusal and purchase, it's the place to find everything from a roll of film to a widescreen telly. Backed by mail order specialists, Capital Sound & Vision, all orders are despatched by first class post or next day courier.
www.unbeatable.co.uk

unbeatable.co.uk

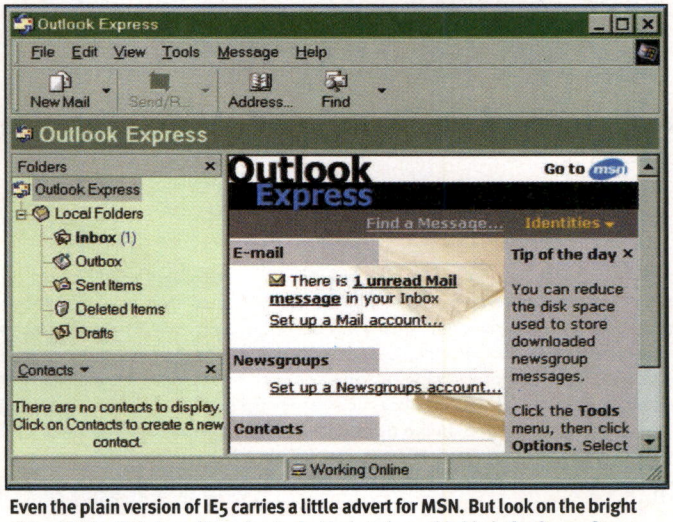
Beware second phone lines

Q I'm thinking about installing a second telephone line so I can be connected to the Net and still receive calls through my existing line. But I've heard stories about second lines, and the connection speed with which you connect to the Net is slow to say the least. I think you've suggested making sure that the person who installs the line knows it's for the Internet, and to ask them to install a specific type of line and not a normal additional telephone line. Is this correct?

Kevin Plant
kp360@freenetname.co.uk

A Roger Gann replies: This is an old chestnut and one that crops up on these pages on a regular basis. You must be careful when you order a second phone line. Make it crystal clear to the telco that it's for data use and that under no circumstances is a DACS (Digital Access Carrier Service) to be used. If you don't specify this, instead of giving you a second line, your telco might install a special device in your home that lets two telephone lines share the same cables back to the exchange. This device employs a technique called DACS.

DACS is cost-effective because it uses digital compression techniques to multiplex two lines down one piece of wire. But in doing so it effectively halves the bandwidth of your connection. For voice traffic you'll notice some mild audio degradation – for data traffic you'll suddenly find your V.90 modem connecting at 28.8kbps rather than 50Kbps, which is rather more noticeable. V.90 modems rely on a direct link to the exchange, which must be unadulterated by any further digital to analogue conversions – DACS introduces two of these conversions. Even if you're not using a V.90 modem, you'll be more susceptible to line disconnections and lower connect speeds from your modem.



Even the plain version of IE5 carries a little advert for MSN. But look on the bright side – it's the little branding adverts that help to keep this kind of software free

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Comedy of errors

Q I keep getting this error message listed below – it seems obvious, but I can't figure out how to fix it, can you help?

"ERROR: The requested URL could not be retrieved"

While trying to retrieve the URL https://dps1.travelocity.com:443, I get the following error:

"ERROR 704 — NetCache is not configured for SSL/SNEWS or other tunnelling requests. This means that: Your browser is configured for SSL requests (for example, https or SNEWS) but NetCache is not. This prevents SSL requests from being completed. Please contact your system administrator."

Rich Hearn
richard.w.hearn@usa.net

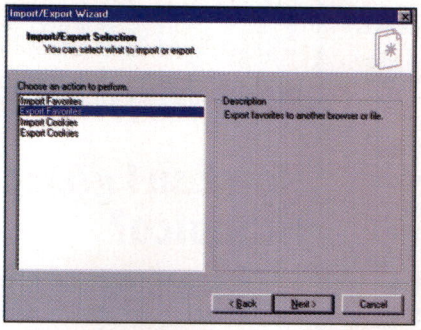
A Roger Gann replies: For once, this is an error message that explains the problem and gives you an exact solution. It seems you're trying to access a site from a networked PC, and the network's using NetCache to cache Web accesses to boost perceived Web browsing speeds. NetCache is a box with a lot of memory and a fast hard disk. Travelocity is an e-commerce site. To make it secure, the connection to that Web site employs Secure Socket Layer (SSL) to encrypt your transaction details. NetCache specifically supports SSL Tunnelling, so I can only assume your system administrator has deliberately turned this feature off, hence the error message. To get it switched back on, 'contact your system administrator'.

Finding your favourites

Q Is there any way I can print or cut and paste my Favourites into a Word document? I'd like to have access to my Favourites folders without being at my computer, and I'd like to set up a Web site with all my links.

Ian Read
ian@ipread.freeserve.co.uk

A Richard Baguley replies: If you're using Netscape, you'll find your Bookmarks stored as an HTML file called bookmarks.htm in the users folder in Program files\Netscape\Users. You can copy this file onto your Web site and access it with any browser anywhere. If you're using Explorer, it's a bit more complex, because IE stores your list of Favorites in a special file format. But newer versions of Explorer let you export your Favourites list as an HTML file by selecting Import and Export from the file menu.



IE's built-in export wizard lets you export or import your favourites as an HTML file, or even directly into Navigator

Select this, and then choose Export Favourites from the list. You can then select the Favourites you want to export – choosing the Favourites folder will export all of them. Click on Next, and select Export to a file. You should click on Browse, otherwise the program will overwrite your Netscape Favourites list. Tell it where to save the HTML file to, and you can upload this to your Web site.

The video's broken again

Q How can you get Netscape to run an embedded .mpg video? Do you need a special plug-in? I've put it in with the following code, and it works fine in IE5, but does nothing in Netscape 4.7.

```
<EMBED SRC="video.mpg"
   WIDTH="256"
   HEIGHT="256"
   ALIGN="BOTTOM">
```

I've got the QuickTime 4 plug-in, but that doesn't recognise .mpg files. My university will only let us use Netscape on the network for security reasons, and we want to use some .mpg videos in some course material.

Steve Cushion
cushion@lgu.ac.uk

A Richard Baguley replies: The default installation of Navigator 4.7 doesn't like embedded .mpg files, and I can't find a plug-in player that can deal with .mpg files (although I'm sure 15,000 people will now email me with one). I suggest you look at another video format with better plug-in support, such as RealVideo G2 or Microsoft ASF. Both of these are streaming media formats, but they don't require a specialist server – they can be streamed from a bog standard Web server with no extra software. You'll need to convert the video into this new format, but there are several programs that can do this, such as the excellent Media Cleaner (www.terran.com).

Another alternative would be to not embed the .mpg video files. If your users have relatively new machines, they should have Microsoft's Windows Media Player installed, which can play .mpg video files. Instead of embedding them, simply link to them as normal and they'll play back in a window. It's not quite as elegant as embedding the video within the page, but it's a simple solution.

This site is too secure

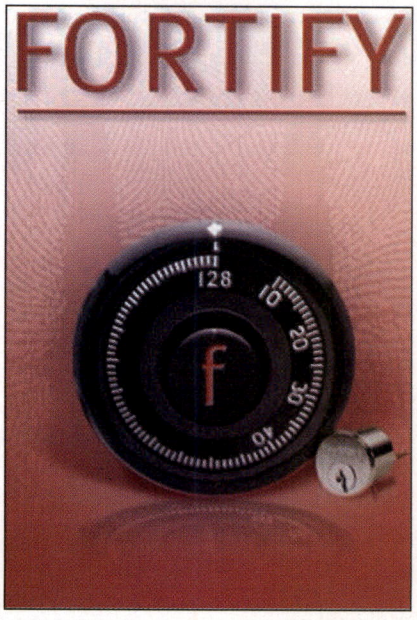
Q I've just started to use a new online banking service, but I keep getting a message that my browser doesn't support the 128-bit security needed for the site. Which browser supports this?

David Holland
david.holland3@virgin.net

A Richard Baguley replies: The person to blame for this is Bill Clinton. The US Government passed a series of rules ,making it illegal to export any software from the US that uses strong encryption (which they describe as anything that uses a key bigger than 40 bits). Most of the browsers are written in the US, so they deliberately nobbled the export version of the software to only use 40-bit encryption, and the version with 128-bit encryption is only available to US citizens.

But there are ways around this. You could try using the Opera browser, which supports 128-bit encryption as it was written in Norway, so you can download it from www.opera.com.

Most of the online banking systems work best with Explorer or Navigator, so if Opera doesn't work, your other option is to download a free program called Fortify (from www.fortify.net), which adds 128-bit encryption to Netscape. In the near future, the situation with browsers is likely to change because the rules on exporting strong encryption products have been relaxed, but these new rules haven't come into effect yet.



Fortify adds strong encryption to the Navigator Web browser

Am I going deaf?

Q I can't get any soundfiles to work when my Web page downloads. I use Explorer on a Mac and put in the following tag, which every book says is the simplest way to get sound on your page.

Here's a copy of my instructions

```
<META NAME="robots"
   CONTENT="NOINDEX,
   NOFOLLOW">
</HEAD>
<BODY BGCOLOR="WHITE"
   ALINK="yellow" VLINK=
   "gray" LINK="blue">
<BGSOUND SRC="sound/
   football.aif" LOOP="1">
<BGSOUND SRC="sound/
   football.wav" AUTOSTART=
   "TRUE" LOOP="1">
<BGSOUND SRC="sound/
   football.au" AUTOSTART=
   "TRUE" LOOP="1">
<!—main table—>
<TABLE WIDTH="660"><TR>
   <TD>
<!—file top—>
<TABLE WIDTH="645"><TR>
<TD VALIGN=MIDDLE ALIGN=
   CENTER WIDTH="510"><IMG
   SRC="grafix/bluefile.gif"
WIDTH="500" HEIGHT="39">
   <BR>
```

I record the sound with Sound App in the correct way – it plays when I test it in my browser, but it disappears when I launch the site on the Net. To try and make the

sound compatible for other users I also include:

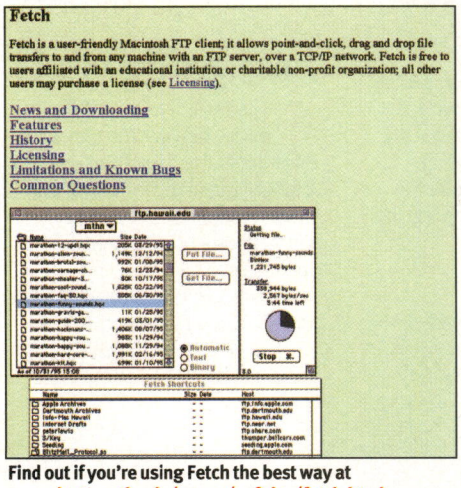
```
<BGSOURCE="sound.wav"
   LOOP=1>
<BGSOURCE="sound.au"
   LOOP=1>
```

Each sound is properly converted to the appropriate .wav .aif or .au and placed on the page at some point between the <BODY> tags. I presume I'm going wrong when I upload the files by choosing the wrong format, but I've tried combinations of all those available and I still can't get any sound. I'm using Fetch to transport the files, but I can't find any help which tells me which format to use for sound files. Do I use Raw Data, Mac Binary II or Binhex or maybe Text?
Paul Ailey
ailey@dircon.co.uk

A Susan Costello replies: You're right, Paul, there's nothing wrong with the code you've used to embed the sound on your page. It could be that the file cannot be found. Unix servers are case-sensitive – they interpret capital letters as different characters to lower case letters. Check that your folder and file names are the same case, both in the HTML page and on your computer. Check that the case hasn't changed after you've uploaded them to the server.

Or, as you've already suggested, the file format might not be copying over correctly when you upload it. The file should be in binary format. The automatic or binary setting in Fetch is what you need – the Automatic/Text/Binary help topic under Reference should explain it more clearly.

Also, this Web site gives you more information about Fetch – **www.dartmouth.edu/pages/softdev/fetch.html** or you could email **fetch@dartmouth.edu** with a more specific question.



Find out if you're using Fetch the best way at www.dartmouth.edu/pages/softdev/fetch.html

We need the font of all knowledge

Q We're in the process of creating a Web site on a Mac using Adobe GoLive 4. But because of the differences in font sizes between PCs and Macs, our site looks messy when you open it on a PC. Is there any way around this problem? We've looked at using font sets – is this possible, or are we barking up the wrong tree? Could you also let me know if it's possible to open Web pages that were created on a Mac on a PC to make changes or updates?
John Bryceland
jbryceland@Coltas.co.uk

A Mike Slocombe replies: You can't guarantee that fonts will look exactly the same on every browser on every platform, but a good compromise is to specify sets of the most common fonts. These are usually Arial, Helvetica, Verdana and Sans-serif for sans-serif fonts, and Times New Roman, Times and Serif for serif fonts. You can specify these font preferences using the <font face> tag, but it's better to use style sheets – your visitors can still override your choices using their browser preferences. You can embed fonts, but this technology is still in its infancy and, sadly, doesn't work on all browsers.

For further info on style sheets, check out:

- **www.w3.org/Style/css/draft.html**
- **http://webreview.com/wr/pub/guides/style**
- **http://css.nu**
- **www.roga.demon.co.uk/author/css.htm**

There's no reason why you can't edit your pages on different platforms – HTML is simply text-based information, so any text editor or decent HTML package will do, though you might run into problems with some WYSIWYG programs that add their own non-standard code and proprietary extensions.

Victim of big brother

Q As well as being a researcher for a university, I work on the design of Web sites and Internet-related matters. I'm developing a site for our department with another colleague. Since we started it, we haven't shown it to anyone. We went to talk to one of the people in charge of the development of the whole Institute's Web site in order to see if we were on the right track. At that meeting, this lady told us, before we even showed her our Web site, that she didn't agree with the colour scheme we were using. It turns out our development site had been shown during a meeting by the administrator of the server. This guy didn't know what was in my folder on the server, but he must have had a

Top question wins a pager and Mini-Mail service

How can I go local down in Acapulco?

Q I found your comparison of ISPs in the December issue useful and informative. But there's one aspect you didn't cover - international access. I travel abroad a lot and need to be able to access my mail on my laptop. I'd like to do this by making a local phone call from the hotel room, and I'm sure there are many other people who do the same thing, when possible.

AOL has local servers in 50 countries, so I use them at the moment. But this is only because I haven't found another ISP with such extensive international coverage. I don't like AOL for many other reasons and I'd like to change. Can you tell me which other ISPs offer similar access from abroad?
Richard Mabbitt
Mabbittrg@aol.com

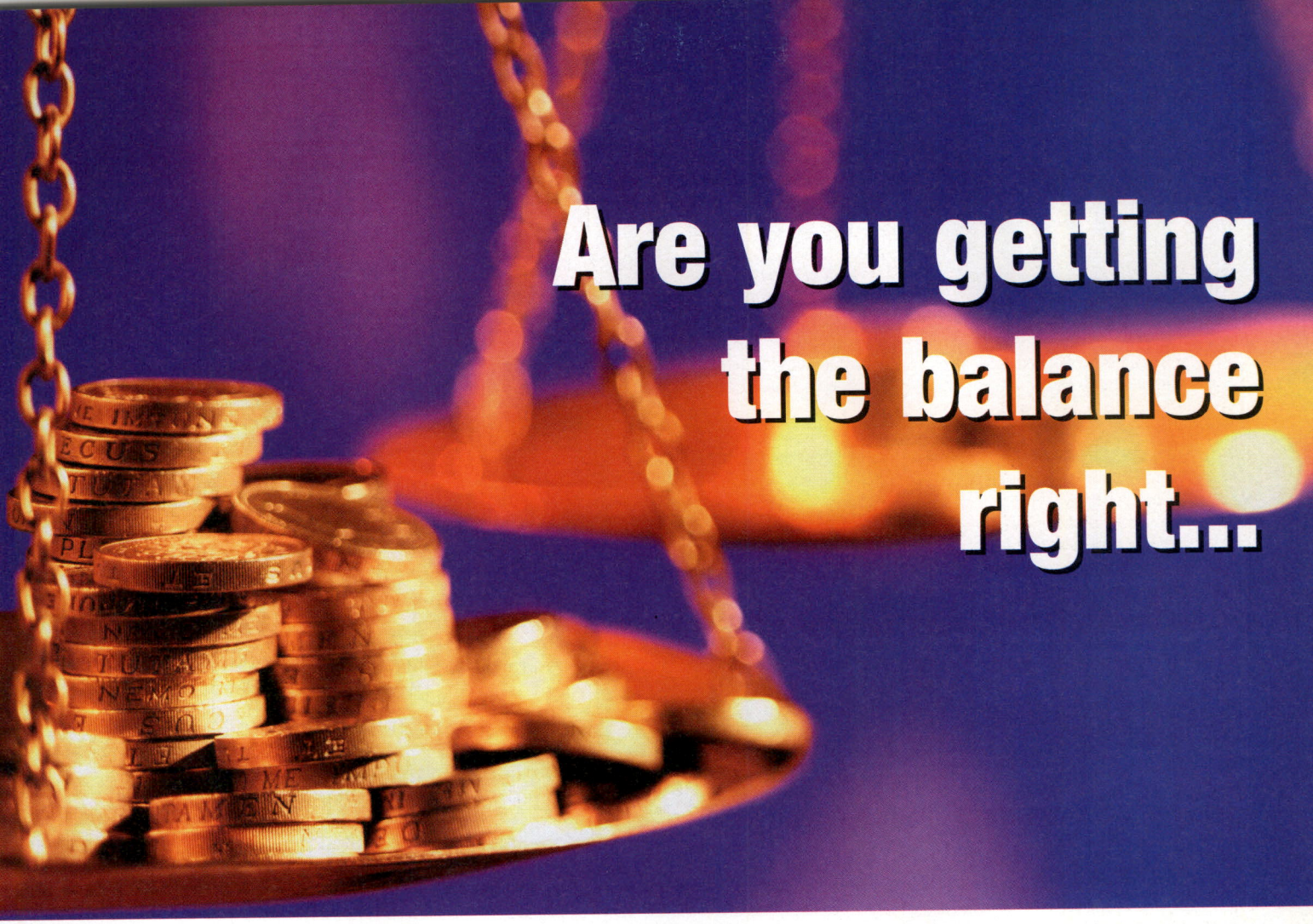
For local ISP access abroad, try iPass

A Andrew Starling replies: This kind of service is called global roaming. Another major ISP with enough fingers in foreign pies to offer global roaming through its own international presence is UUNet (Pipex Dial). The two major agencies, iPass and GRIC, give you access to local ISPs almost anywhere in the world. You'll need to sign up with a participating UK ISP and it'll cost you a few extra pounds a month. For more details see **www.ipass.com** and **www.gric.com**.

This solves the local access part of your problem. The other part is accessing your usual mailbox. In most cases you'll be able to get straight into your mailbox using the foreign ISP. But if things get tough, you can use the "get external mail" feature of a Yahoo! Mail or Hotmail account. You might find it even easier to use ThatWeb (**www.thatweb.com**), a service that lets you enter your own email address and password and access email from anywhere. You'll finish up with mail in different formats, but it's a small price to pay for this useful service.

The Mini-Mail service is ideal for dial up Internet users. With no need to keep checking to see if e-mails have arrived, subscribers are able to make great savings. There is no need to change an existing email account as Mini-Mail can be used with all POP3 accounts. Mini-Mail can also check other email accounts and notify the pager of specific emails waiting in those mailboxes.

The three month e.one email notification service costs £49.99 a year, or £15 a quarter, and lets you receive up to 30 messages a day via the Net and 50 messages a month via the bureau. The e.four package costs £99.99 and includes free email notification for three months, a free Web-based email account, free Net access and free software to send pager messages direct from a PC.



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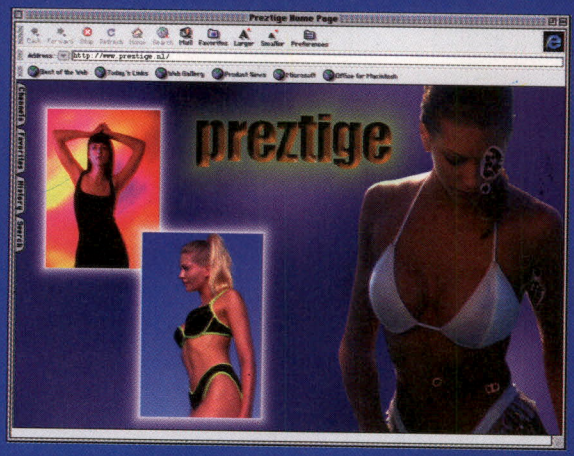

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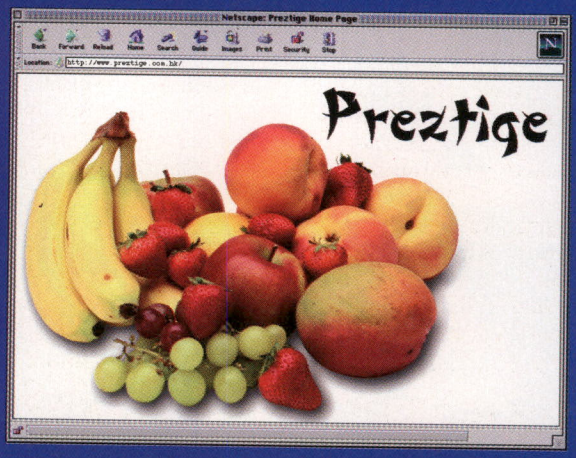

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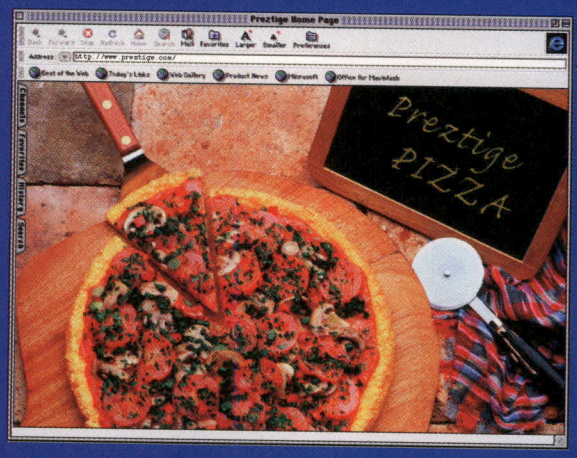

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good look into my files and showed what he found to everyone in the meeting. He's argued that, being the server's administrator, he's entitled to go into the folders and look at any kind of information he finds. He says that since that information is in the server, users should know that anyone could have access to it.

I can't agree with him. He's completely wrong from my point of view. I feel he's violated ethical and privacy rules. I really need to know if there's any law or any regulation that could protect me in this case. I feel vulnerable now and I'd be grateful if you could offer me some help and guidance on this matter.

Maria Toro
mariae@torot.freeserve.co.uk

A Michael Chissick replies: There's no general right to privacy in the UK. You say you're a researcher, and therefore I assume you're an employee. An employer is usually able to view employees' work. But good employers should have a policy which employees can access so they know what an employer's policy is on viewing employees' files and messages. For future reference, you shouldn't use the university's systems if you want to guarantee privacy and confidentiality in your work. You could consider raising a complaint within the university that the services administrator has exceeded his authority. This might at least highlight your concerns.

Expert Helpline

Unfortunately, we don't have the space to answer all your queries, and sometimes you want a faster answer. Why not try our recommended helpline service? It comes at a premium price, but we think it's worth it.

Calls are charged at £1.50 a minute and you shouldn't be on the phone for more than five minutes. There's even a no quibble, money back guarantee in case you're not satisfied. Just let us know, and we'll make sure you get a refund.

The helpline deals with dial-up and browser queries, but it can't answer questions about corporate network connections.

(09064) 664 460
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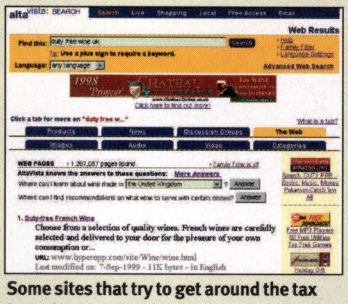
Legal brief: The taxman is watching you

Michael Chissick explains the anomalies that arise through the Inland Revenue having to apply existing tax laws to e-commerce

In principle, transacting over the Internet is no different from doing business in any other medium. The tax systems of the UK and other countries are designed to tax trading in whatever form. Earlier this year, Freefags.com (**www.freefags.com**) was set up in a bid to circumvent the UK's high customs duties on cigarettes. If you bought a lighter for £24.99, you'd be 'given' 200 cigarettes for free. The cigarettes and lighter were posted from Spain, where excise duty on a packet of cigarettes was only 51p compared to £2.28 in the UK. The scheme didn't work. Customs & Excise said the full UK duty had to be paid because the cigarettes were not a gift for tax purposes. A gift cannot be paid for, whether directly or indirectly, and must not contain a commercial element.

But there are legitimate ways for you to exploit the Internet to achieve tax savings. Existing tax laws weren't drafted with the Net in mind. They're based on geography (where a company is located or doing business) and on physicality (the type of products or services sold). The Internet transcends these barriers, and this creates some anomalies.



Some sites that try to get around the tax laws don't stay active for long. Here's an example still listed by AltaVista

A non-UK resident company is only taxed on its UK trading income, which can be attributed to a permanent establishment in the UK. As the Internet lets a company provide services to UK customers without having any physical presence in the country, UK corporation tax (or income tax if you're trading as an individual or a partnership) can therefore be avoided by trading from a non-UK base. The Inland Revenue has to be satisfied that the central management and control is not in the UK. The company would still be subject to the taxes in its home territory, but there's scope to locate in a more 'tax friendly' country without harming your ability to trade with UK customers.

Determining whether goods and services sold to UK customers will be subject to UK tax laws is more complex. VAT is charged on the supply of goods and services, on the purchase of goods from another EU member state and on the importation of goods from outside the EU. If the Internet's used as a mechanism for ordering and paying for products, VAT rules apply in the usual way. But if a company is using the Net as the medium for delivering or receiving a product (for instance, by downloading software or audio/visual material), the rules throw up some curious anomalies. You don't pay VAT on books in the UK, but the charge for downloading a book from the Internet attracts VAT at the full rate because it's deemed as supplying a service.

The VAT treatment of downloaded software is even odder, because 'off the shelf' software is treated differently from bespoke software. For VAT purposes, off the shelf software is treated as goods. If a UK company sells this software to people in France, the price is subject to the French equivalent of VAT. Bespoke software is treated as a service, and is subject to VAT in the country where the supplier belongs. So, if the same UK company sells bespoke software to French customers, the price is subject to UK VAT.

Existing VAT rules could also catch Internet users, such as members of an information-sharing network. Even though no money changes hands, VAT law might deem that 'consideration' has been provided for the information and that VAT is therefore payable.

Trying to avoid customs duties has attracted the most activity. If, as a UK resident, you use the Internet to order goods from a foreign supplier, custom duties will be payable. But services aren't liable to customs duties, which is why several leading bookmakers have set up offshore online bookmaking services.

Michael Chissick is head of the Internet and On-Line Law Group at City law firm Field Fisher Waterhouse. He can be contacted at mpc@ffwlaw.com

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net Magazine ISPCON 2000

You've got to laugh. Every time we think we've got the ISP market worked out, everything changes. 1999 was a revolutionary year for UK ISPs, with free access providers flooding the market, the big names holding strong, and the massive campaign for unmetered calls looking set to change everything again.

ISPCON is Europe's only ISP convention, and the longest standing dedicated industry forum for Internet Service Providers. It combines a super-summit conference, a dedicated exhibition and a social and networking programme. It aims to be a one-stop shop for ISPs and their suppliers.

The Conference is the core. Hear what the big guns from Europe and the US think about the major technical and business issues – from bandwidth and IP telephony to e-commerce, subscriber management, alliance opportunities and niche strategies.

The Exhibition shows how to turn the theory into practice, with over 100 vendors and their ISP-focused solutions.

Finally, the famous ISPCON Cocktail Party and ISPA Awards Ceremony and Gala Dinner give us all a chance to let our hair down (if we haven't torn it all out yet).

For a copy of the Conference Programme and for more ticket information, visit **www.ispconeurope.com** or call (0870) 7511501

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How to share your Internet connection

Most households only have one phone line and one modem, but more and more have two PCs. Roger Gann shows you how to use the latest, free software to share your single Internet connection between a couple of computers

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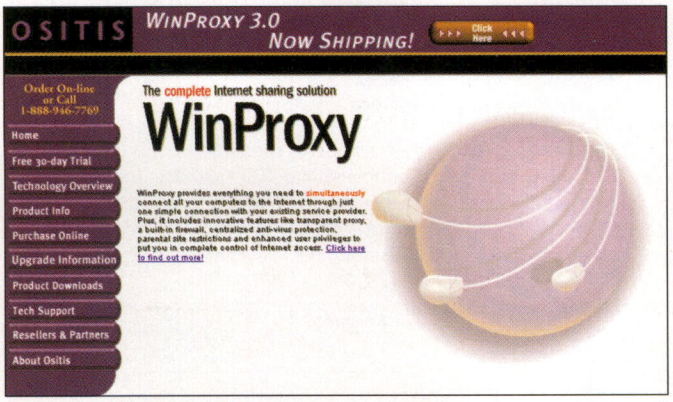
Just as owning two cars or two televisions is now unremarkable, so a household with two PCs is becoming a common occurrence. Most homes only have one phone line and one modem, so you can only use one of your PCs to access the Internet at any one time. A simple, but expensive solution would be to install a second phone line and buy a second modem.

This option is feasible if you're using a dial-up connection over the PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network), but it won't be good enough when cheap, permanent high-speed connections to the Net arrive (hopefully) later this year.

The best solution to getting more than one PC online at home is to share your single Internet connection. There are several ways of achieving this, such as using hardware like a router or a proxy server. But you can now share your connection free of charge with Microsoft's ICS software.

While it's been possible to share a fax modem since 1993 – with Microsoft's Windows for Workgroups 3.1 – only Back Office Small Business Server includes a modem sharing facility. But that all changed last year with the release of Windows 98 Second Edition. Apart from the usual round of bug fixes and general improvements, Windows 98 SE only featured a few new features, but the most interesting – Internet Connection Sharing (ICS) – was borrowed from the Windows 2000 goodie bag.

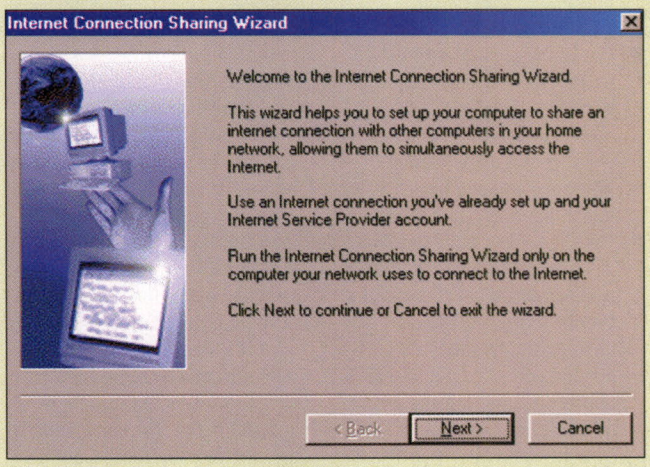
This lets your host PC act as an Internet 'gateway' for your other networked (client) PCs, and it lets you perform different Internet tasks simultaneously. For instance, you could send and receive email, while another person downloads a file and someone else browses the Web – three PCs using the Internet from one connection.



Connect all your PCs to the Net using software like WinProxy (www.winproxy.com)

The other PCs that connect to your gateway computer (with the Internet connection) receive network configuration using Directory Naming Service (DNS) and Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP) to deal with the issue of Internet names. The connected PCs and their software

How to install ICS



Follow our six-step guide to installing ICS, in conjunction with the ICS wizard, and you'll be able to connect your network to the Web using a single connection

Step 1

If you already have another sharing application, such as Sygate or Wingate, you should uninstall it before installing the ICS program. Some sharing programs, including ICS, can take control of your network adaptors and protocols, and this can lead to conflicts if you're running more than one sharing utility.

To install ICS, open your Control Panel and double-click on Add/Remove Programs. Click on the Windows Setup tab. Scroll down to Internet Tools and click the Details button. Check the Internet Connection Sharing tick box, click OK, then select Apply. Have your Windows 98 SE CD-ROM ready at this point. The ICS Wizard will launch.

The first selection you need to make in the wizard is the type of connection you'll be using. Make sure you select the right one, because if you make a mistake, you'll have to uninstall or reinstall the program. If you're using a cable modem, you'll be asked to select a network adaptor (NIC). Make sure you choose the adaptor that's attached to your cable modem. If you choose the wrong one, ICS won't work and you'll have to remove the program, reinstall it and try again. The wizard will number your network adaptors #1 and #2, but you won't be able to tell which is connected to the cable modem and which is connected to your LAN. You'll just have to guess.

Click Next and insert a blank formatted floppy disk in your computer. The wizard creates a special installation floppy disk to use on your client PC(s) – this is for Windows 9x PCs only. Click OK when the disk has been created, then select Finish and restart your PC when prompted.

also get comprehensive protocol support. For instance, you can play Internet games on any of your PCs without additional configuration, or you can use Point-to-Point Tunnelling Protocol (PPTP) and Virtual Private Network (VPN) to gain access to corporate networks.

ICS is only found in the full retail and upgrade versions of Windows 98 SE – the downloadable free Windows 98 Customer Service Pack upgrade doesn't include it.

There a few things you need to do or check before you install ICS:

- A functioning network interface card must be properly installed in each computer and your network must be up and running, with TCP/IP installed on all the PCs. If you're sharing a DSL, cable modem, or other Ethernet-based Internet connection, your gateway PC must have two network interface cards installed.
- One of the computers must be running Windows 98 SE (or Windows 2000) and have a properly configured and working dial-up networking Internet connection, such as a V.90 modem or cable modem.
- The client PCs can be running any type of Windows 9x. ICS will also support Mac OS and Linux clients, though Microsoft – unsurprisingly – doesn't advertise this fact. Sadly, ICS is poorly documented and it isn't obvious how to install, configure and run the program, which is a shame as it's a good solution for what will soon become a common problem. That's why we've created a six-step installation guide that tells you how to help you.

How ICS works

Internet Connection Sharing is an elaborate trick – at its most basic level, it fools the Internet into thinking you only have one PC connected and not two or more. Your host PC (which has ICS installed) acts as a gateway through which all incoming and outgoing data passes.

ICS comprises the following components:

- **DHCP Allocator** – a simplified Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol service that assigns an IP address, gateway and name server on your local network.
- **DNS Proxy** – resolves names on behalf of local network clients and forwards queries.
- **Network Address Translation (NAT)** – maps a set of private addresses (for your PCs) to a set of public addresses (the Web). NAT translates private IP addresses and public destination IP addresses for outbound traffic. It changes the IP address information and edits the required IP header information on the fly.
- **Auto-dial** – to make connections automatically.
- **APIs** – for configuration, status and dial control for applications.

Public and private addresses

With Windows 98 ICS, each of your PCs is given its own unique IP address, just like every other computer on the Internet. The difference is these addresses are non-routable – or private – and provide no direct access to the Net.

The only computer on your network with a public IP address is your gateway PC. ISPs assign a public IP address when you connect to the Net, while the ICS wizard automatically gives your computer a private IP number.

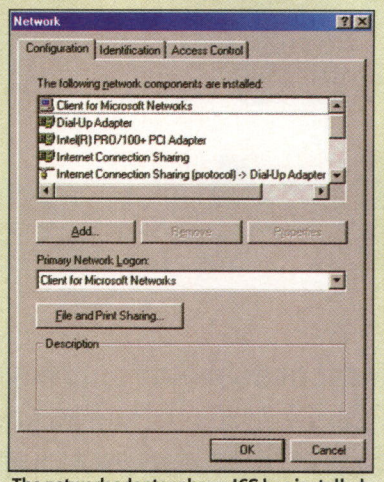
The default IP address for your gateway PC will be 192.168.0.1 – the entire 192.168 series is nominated as private and invisible to the Internet. This is the default address that the ICS wizard uses, but you can change it in the Network applet in your Control Panel.

The other computers on your network need IP addresses in the range 192.168.0.2 through 192.168.0.253. You can manually assign these addresses, but it's much easier to let DHCP or Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol take care of this. DHCP consists of a pool of IP addresses that are assigned by ICS to all PCs that request an IP address when they attempt their first Net connection.

When a PC on your network sends a request to the Net, such as to send email or connect to a Web page, the PC's private IP address is sent to your gateway PC. The private address is translated to the gateway PC's public address. The response from the Internet comes back to the gateway PC's public IP address, and it sends this to the appropriate PC on your network. The Internet thinks it's dealing with one PC, while the other computers on your network act as though they have a direct link to the Internet.

While ICS gives you free connection sharing, it doesn't double or treble your bandwidth. If you're using a 56K modem, one PC might get 4Kb or 5Kb of bandwidth, while two will get half this, and so on. But for most of the time, you won't really notice the loss of

Don't click Cancel or restart your computer before completing this wizard. There's no way to start it again, so if it's interrupted, you'll have to start all over again, which means removing and reinstalling the program.



The network adaptor shows ICS has installed

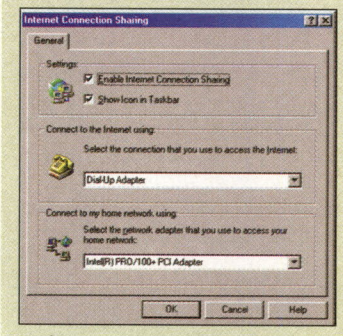
Step 2

Check you've installed ICS correctly on your gateway PC by right-clicking on Network Neighborhood and examining the installed network components on the Configuration tab. Internet Connection Sharing should be listed as a new network adaptor. You should see three new instances of TCP/IP:

TCP/IP Home – Your network interface card
TCP/IP Shared – Dial-up adaptor
TCP/IP – Internet Connection Sharing

Home refers to the device you've used to connect your host to the rest of your home network – if you select it and click Properties, you'll notice that a static IP address (usually 192.168.0.1) has been assigned to it. Shared refers to the device used to provide the shared Internet connection, while the last entry is what used to be the TCP/IP properties of your existing Internet connection. You can look at the ICSSETUP.LOG file for a complete log of the installation.

Step 3



Make sure you've checked the tick box that lets you share your Net connection

To activate the useful ICS status icon in the System tray, right-click the Internet Explorer icon on your desktop and select Properties. Click the Connections tab and select the 'new' Sharing button in the LAN Settings box. Check the Show icon in the Taskbar tick box. When you right-click on the ICS Icon in the system tray, you can choose from:

- **Status** – this'll show you the number of PCs using your single Internet connection. Note that it can take as long as 15 minutes before ICS shows the correct number of connections. This is because ICS holds Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) and User Datagram Protocol (UDP) ports open for up to 10 minutes after the activity on a port has stopped. When a port is open for a client PC, ICS counts the port as a connected client. The number of connected PCs is updated after the port is closed.
- **Options** – this'll show you the limited ICS control panel. Make sure the settings are as follows: no control of logging, no ability to open special ports, no control over Client network access (other than to shut off ICS) and no control over ICS's DHCP server.

- **Disable Internet Connections Sharing** – you can use this to disable your Internet connection sharing.

Step 4

Setting up a client PC is simple – you just run the Browser Connection Setup wizard. Insert the floppy disk you made in Step 1 Click the Start button and click Run. Type A:\ICSCLSET.EXE and click OK. ICLSET

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bandwidth. If two PCs are randomly browsing the Net, the loss of bandwidth will be hardly noticeable – Web pages, downloaded sporadically, don't amount to much in the way of data. The crunch comes when more than one PC on network is doing bandwidth-hungry tasks, such as downloading files, at the same time.

Troubleshooting ICS

ICS can sometimes autodial or fail to disconnect. This happens if there's network activity between your gateway PC and your ISP. This includes DNS queries, Critical Update Notification for Windows Update, product registrations and subscription updates.

You can adjust your timeout disconnection settings by right-clicking on the Internet Explorer icon on your desktop, selecting Properties and clicking the Connection tab. Select a connection in the Dial-Up Settings window. Now click Settings, and in Dial-Up Settings of My Connection Settings, click Advanced.

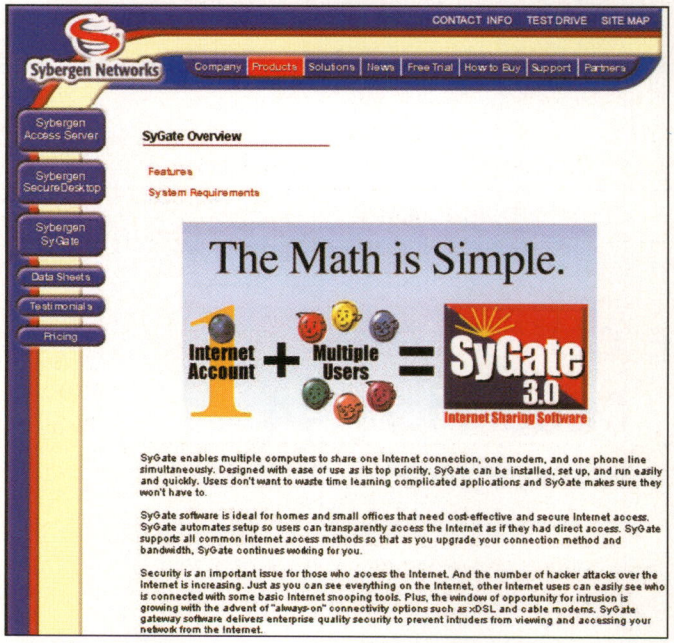
You can find out about your network activity by looking at the contents of the ICSLOG.TXT file. On your gateway PC, click Start, go to Find and select Files Or Folders. In the Named box, type icslog.* and click Find Now. Double-click the Icslog.txt file to open it in Notepad.

The ICSLOG.TXT file contains all the ICS network activity since the last time you started your computer. When you restart your machine, the ICSLOG.TXT file is renamed ICSLOG.OLD and a new ICSLOG.TXT file is created. The following text is an example of what might be contained in an ICSLOG.TXT file:

12/05/1999 11:07:29 - Internet Connection Sharing log opened
12/05/1999 11:07:30 - The automatic addressing server has been started
12/05/1999 11:07:30 - The Internet Connection Sharing driver is running
12/05/1999 11:13:13 - AutoDial is using connection: WinISP
12/05/1999 11:13:37 - AutoDial connected to: WinISP

The ICSLOG.TXT file is useful for connections such as ISDN or analogue phones that use dial-up networking. For connections such as DSL or cable modems that use a network adaptor, the contents of the Icslog.txt file simply shows that the Internet Connection Sharing driver is running.

ICS is not without its problems, and the Microsoft KnowledgeBase (**http://support.microsoft.com/search**) has 60 articles on ICS. See also **www.infinisource.com/techfiles/ics-mskb.html**.



Most Internet sharing solutions provide methods of protecting your network

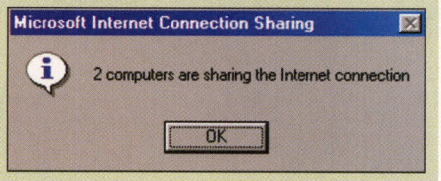
Commercial Alternatives

Proxy – available from **www.analogx.com/contents/download/network/proxy.htm**
WinProxy – available from **www.winproxy.com**
Wingate – available from **www.wingate.com**
Sygate – available from **www.sygate.com**

This wizard helps you set up your PCs to access the Net through your network

tweaks the client PC's TCP/IP configuration for you. If your client PCs don't have Windows 9x, you can configure the client PCs TCP/IP settings yourself. Set them to Obtain an IP address automatically using DHCP. Clear any gateway entries and disable DNS.

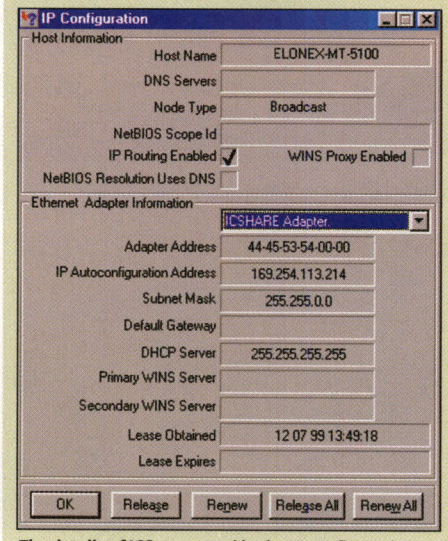
Step 5



To make sure your client PC is configured correctly, click the Start button and select Run. Type WINIPCFG and click OK. This launches the Windows 98 TCP/IP configuration utility. As well as the usual network adaptor and Dial-Up Adaptor entries, you should also find a third entry here called ICSHARE. The client PC automatically collects its TCP/IP configuration from the ICS server, courtesy of DHCP. If ICS is working correctly, you should see an IP address such as 192.168.0.2, or similar.

Step 6

With ICS up and running, you can connect to the Internet in the usual way, with your gateway PC, either explicitly – using dial-up networking – or by launching Internet Explorer or Outlook Express, to cause it to automatically dial out. If you launch a browser on your client PC and the ICS gateway computer isn't connected, it'll automatically dial out and connect for you. If you right-click the ICS icon on the taskbar and select Status from the pop-up menu, you'll see a dialog like this: "Don't forget, your gateway PC has to be switched on for the other PCs to be able to dial-out through it". Also, while Windows 98 should disconnect an inactive connection after a specified time-out period, usually five minutes, it occasionally won't. As you won't be able to tell if the connection is still active from a client PC, you should always go to your ICS gateway computer and make sure the connection is terminated at the end of your session. This way, you won't get any nasty surprises when your phone bill arrives.



The details of ICS are stored in the IP configuration

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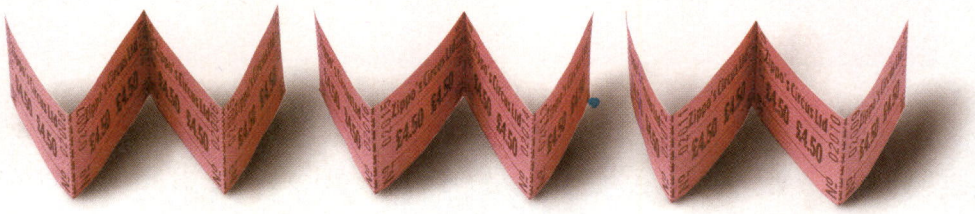

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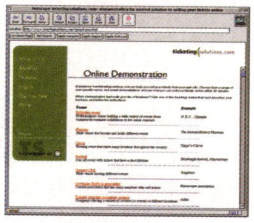

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Getting online with your Mac

Whether you own a new iMac, or an old model that's been sitting in the loft for years, it's now easier than ever to connect your Mac to the Internet. Mike Hales guides you through the process and tells you everything you'll need for a great online experience

Anyone who's seen the iMac adverts on TV could be fooled into believing there are only three steps to getting onto the Internet with an Apple Macintosh. But getting your Mac online isn't the easiest thing to do. Before the iMac, finding an ISP for your old Mac and getting it online was a difficult task.

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From buying to browsing

Apple has worked hard over the past two years to help you get online with your Mac. There's still a long way to go, but it's much easier than you'd expect. All the software you need to get started is already installed on your computer. This includes a Web browser and an email package, such as Microsoft's Internet Explorer 4.5 and Outlook Express. But you don't have to stick with this choice – see the list of alternative browsers below.

You'll already have Microsoft's products installed on your Mac by default. In a bizarre peace pact, Microsoft paid Apple to use its (Microsoft's) Web products as the default installation for Macs.

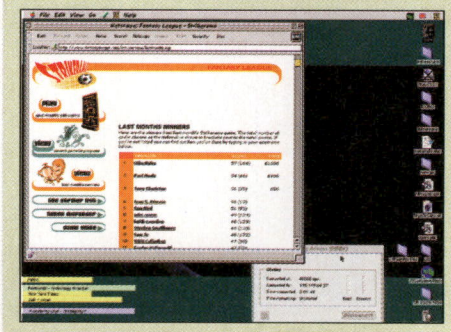
Choosing your ISP

Microsoft's dominance of the computer market is extended online – you'll find far more Windows Web sites and products than Mac-friendly ones.

Only a few ISPs have full technical support for Macs, so ask your provider before you sign up. You should also ask if a Mac specialist is available outside normal working hours (9am-5pm).

Which browser should you use ?

Mac users tend to prefer Netscape programs. Navigator is just a browser, while Communicator comes with email, FTP, newsgroups and an HTML editor. If you're only planning to browse the Web, use Navigator. Communicator is simple to use though (despite the 8MB download),



Netscape Navigator is recommended for Mac users

because all the applications you'll need for the Web launch automatically when required.

The downside of Netscape is it's suffering as a software company, and developers are biased towards Internet Explorer, so you often have to wait longer for the Netscape version of a site. Netscape hasn't done enough with its new 4.7 browser to match the advancements of IE5.

Internet Explorer is installed as the default browser on most new Macs, but many users are still swapping back to Navigator. This is purely because Explorer has a few teething problems on the Mac platform. It comes with additional applications, such as FTP, but you'll need to use Outlook Express (which is also bundled by default) for using email and newsgroups.

The new IE5 browser looks impressive. It easily matches specialist email packages, such as Claris Emailer (www.claris.com) and Eudora (www.eudora.com). IE5 also has some nice features, such as auto form filling, which can take the chore out of signing up for services online, as well as remembering your passwords.

Other browsers

There are two types of alternatives to Netscape and Internet Explorer – standard browsers and text-only programs

Cyberdog
This Apple-created browser, email and FTP package is no longer being supported by Apple, but it has an easy to use interface and its devotees still post updates online.
www.cyberdog.org

Internet Explorer 5 leaves Netscape trailing behind

The features of Communicator will suit new users

ICab
A German browser that uses far less memory than Netscape and Explorer, but it's short on support for plug-ins and Java.
www.icab.de

MacLynx
The best of the text-only browsers. With no graphics and ads to wait for, browsing is fast.
www.lirmm.fr/~gutkneco/maclynx

Mozilla
This is a Netscape-backed, independent version of Navigator. You'll need some technical expertise, but it'll continue to develop and grow much faster than the standard issue browsers.
www.mozilla.org/build/mac.html

For a host of Mac browsers, check out the **Tucows Network** at www.tucows.com.

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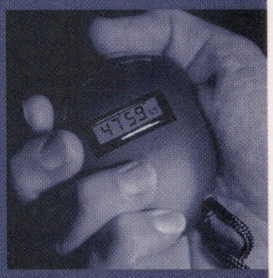

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Many of the free ISPs, such as LineOne (**www.lineone.net**) and Freeserve (**www.freeserve.net**) are Mac friendly and offer you the quickest and cheapest way to get online. If you're new to the Net, but you're prepared to pay for your access, UUNET Pipex (**www.dial.pipex.com**) and Prestel Online (**www.prestel.net**) offer good technical support for Macs.

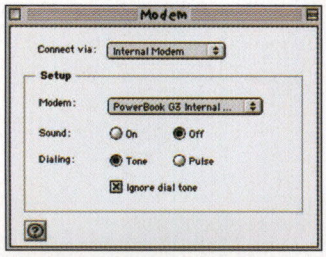
For a complete listing of ISPs, see the Resource section of our Web site (**www.internet-magazine.com**). For an essential guide to your prospective ISP's reliability, check our monthly (page 138) and six-monthly (page 143) ISP tests.

Once you're connected to the Web, you're unlikely to run into problems that can't be solved with the help of the active online Mac community (see the Super Starter Sites, right). And as long as you follow the standard rules of regular backing up and virus checking, you shouldn't experience any major problems at all.

Getting online

First things first. You'll need a modem, the faster the better – if you're planning to use something faster, such as BT's Home Highway service, you'll need an ISDN terminal adaptor.

Modems translate analogue signals to digital and back again, whereas ISDN is purely digital. This isn't as scary as it sounds, and you can get a new terminal adaptor for around £150. If you buy a Mac Powerbook or an iMac, an internal 56K modem is already installed.



Select your type of modem, turn the sound off and select Tone dialling

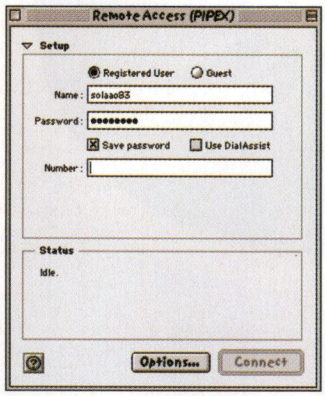
If you have an old Mac and you want to buy a new modem, you need to do a little research to make sure the modem's compatible with your computer – buying the latest USB modem for your old beige Mac could cause problems.

Setting up your software

The system software you need to go online is straightforward. In Control Panels, you'll find a panel called Remote Access. This is your main point of access to the Internet from your computer – it lets you configure all the settings you need to get online. The instructions below apply to Mac OS 8.5 users. If you're using an earlier version of Mac OS, you'll have separate control panels for each of the sections we mention, but the settings are exactly the same.

First, you'll notice that the menu selection along the top of the screen has changed. Under Remote Access, select Modem. Now select whether you have an internal or external modem and state the make and model of your modem, such as an Internal Powerbook G3 .

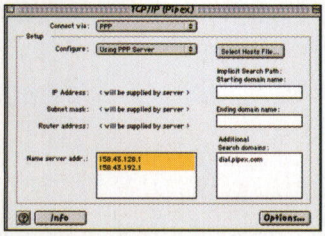
You can choose whether you want to listen to your computer connecting to your ISP (not recommended) and whether your phone is a tone or pulse phone (99 per cent of homes have a tone phone, so choose this).



Save your password if you don't want to type it every time you connect to the Net

Next, select the TCP/IP panel from the Control Panel. This is where the technical settings for your ISP are stored. If you've used an installation CD, these settings will be automatically configured for you. But it's worth checking that the 'Connect via:' option is set to PPP and that the 'Configure' option is set to 'Using PPP Server'. If these are set correctly, you'll already have information in the 'Name Server addr' and 'Additional Search domains' windows.

The last part of setting up your Mac for Net access is inputting your Name (as set by your ISP), as well as your Password and the phone

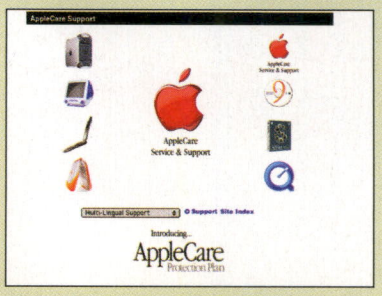


The TCP/IP panel stores your ISP's technical settings

Super Starter Sites

1 Apple

Under all the gloss and hard sell you'll find good technical support and the latest software upgrades here. The Apple Store is good if you're looking to buy more kit, but have a look for bargains first.
www.apple.com



The mothership – buy online or get support

2 MacPlaza

If you're after new sounds, screensavers, desktop pictures and icons for your Mac, MacPlaza has a wide selection that's updated regularly. Remember to run your virus checker over anything before you install it.
www.macplaza.net

3 MacObserver

For hard and fast news on all things Apple, MacObserver will keep you bang up to date with the latest on the company and its products.
www.macobserver.com

4 Mac Resource Page

If you're having technical problems, this is the place to find answers, as well as the latest on Mac OS and other software and hardware.
www.macresource.pair.com

5 iMac.com

This specialist site for the iMac is well worth a bookmark, with product news, advice and an opinion column.
www.imac.com

6 EveryMac

This is a good place to meet fellow Mac users and get the latest news. Members can choose from a good selection of forums .
www.everymac.com

7 O'grady's PowerPage

If you use a Powerbook, this is a great place to keep up to speed with the latest goodies and information.

8 MacWeek

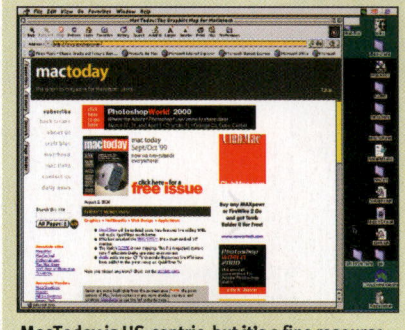
http://macweek.zdnet.com
ZDNet has created an aggregation site, so you can pick through Apple-only daily news, product reviews and opinion pieces.
www.ogrady.com

9 MacToday

If you're interested in graphics, Web design and multimedia, MacToday does a fine job of covering news, product releases and upcoming shows.
www.mactoday.com

10 MacTech

This site has everything you need for the technical development of Mac products and software. Also worth a mention is the MacDirectory (**www.macdirectory.com**), which offers information for beginners through to experts. MacUser (**www.macuser.co.uk**) offers a truly UK look at on Mac matters – a good balance against the predominantly US-based sites we've mentioned.
www.mactech.com



MacToday is US-centric, but it's a fine resource for Web design and multimedia

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- Dedicated games servers
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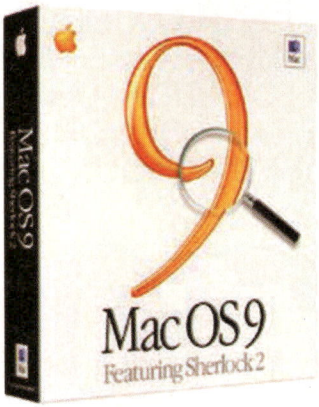
number that your computer needs to dial for access. Make sure you check the Save password box if you don't want to have to type it in every time you log on.

All your applications, as well as your browser and your email software, will pick up and use this information, but you might need to input your email settings if you use a product that you've installed yourself, such as Eudora (**www.eudora.com**).

Last but not least, don't forget to click on Options on the Remote Access window. This lets you set a limit on the amount of time you spend online.

If you don't respond to this reminder while you're browsing, your Mac will cut your connection. This is useful if you've forgotten to disconnect properly, and it makes you realise how long you're spending online.

You'll need to turn the reminder option off if you want to leave your computer unattended while downloading a large file.



Multiple settings

Your ISP will send your configuration information by post, or it can be set automatically if you've used an ISP's installation CD. Once you're online, you can add more ISPs to your Remote Access settings. Press Apple + K, click on Duplicate, then rename the connection and change the settings. This is particularly handy if you plan to travel and you want a UK and a US configuration.

A new operating system

Mac OS 9 will be launched in the UK soon, which is excellent news for online Mac users. Apple has embraced the Internet and geared all of its new hardware and software products towards it. Mac OS 9, if nothing else, will make getting online and using the Internet a lot easier.

Sherlock (the built-in search engine) has been revamped and now has eight channels:

File – searches for files on your Mac

Internet – conducts basic searches on the Net. Type in Jazz Bass Players and it'll find the most appropriate Web sites

People – finds the email addresses of your long lost friends

Shopping – type in what you want to buy and Sherlock compares prices across sites and helps you find the cheapest one

News – looks for the latest news, such as financial information or football scores. Type in a subject and Sherlock gives you the headlines and links to the appropriate Web site

Apple – provides you with the latest company news and releases

Reference – a great tool if you're researching a project or doing your homework. This channel focuses on the reference materials available online, such as Dictionary.com (**www.dictionary.com**) and Roget's Thesaurus (**www.thesaurus.com**).

Sharing

The other advantage of Mac OS 9 is you'll be able to share files across the Net with any other OS 9 Mac user that's online. You don't even need any special software – select the Network Browser under the Apple menu and you'll be able to connect with any site to download or upload files and software.

What software do you need?

You might have the basic tools on your Mac, but there are a few other programs that are worth downloading or getting free from our cover CD

Flash and Shockwave

Rapidly approaching 200 million downloads, Flash and Shockwave are two valuable bits of software that you should install and keep up to date. Flash lets you view specially created files that bring a Web page to life and include animation and sound.

www.macromedia.com

The same can be said for Shockwave, but the style of Shockwave files is likely to be wider reaching. For a good reason to download the latest version of both pieces of software, check out the games and cartoons on **www.shockwave.com**.

Real Player

RealPlayer G2 is a long-established and powerful audio and video player. There are thousands of audio and video files online in Real format, as well as live streaming radio stations from around the world. Real's planning to launch itself as a music portal, so it's worth checking the site over the next few months as more stuff to listen to and watch is bound to appear.
www.real.com

Beatnik

If your browsing's a little too quiet for your tastes, pop along to the Web site of '80s pop star Thomas Dolby. Beatnik is a plug-in and player that literally brings sound into your browser. For some real fun, check out the features that let you remix and record hits from David Bowie and Mr Dolby himself, among others.

There are literally hundreds of other bits and pieces you can add to spice up your online life. But you don't need to go mad – your browser could develop glitches, take an age to start up or generally misbehave itself. If you've downloaded some software, but you haven't used it for at least once a month, store it somewhere else on your machine.
www.beatnik.com

We strongly recommend that you use anti-virus software, such as Virex from Network Associates (**http://cit.uvm.edu/antivirus**), if you're planning to download files and software from the Net.

OS 9 will automatically update itself when you're online. This'll save you a lot of time and hassle, and your Mac will get the latest and best operating system available. This'll be particularly useful if you use software such as QuickTime.

Finally

Using your Mac on the Web is a doddle and there's a good range of browsers to choose from. You might miss out on some of the latest games, due to the sheer number of Windows users online. You might have to wait for the latest version of your favourite software, and you might not have the widest choice of ISPs. But you'll be using a secure and stable operating system, and Macs aren't usually the target for people who create malicious programmes.

Most importantly, Apple is totally committed to the Net in terms of software and hardware – as the iMac, iBook and Mac OS 9 clearly demonstrate.

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How to analyse your logfiles

Logfile analysis gives you essential information about visitors to your Web site, including the search terms they used to find your site, where they linked from and your most popular pages. Andrew Starling shows you how to interpret the data and improve your site accordingly

One of the advantages that a Web site has over books and magazines is you can find out exactly what people are reading and what they're ignoring. We can't tell which articles you read in *Internet Magazine* and which you ignore. But if you've visited our Web site (at **www.internet-magazine.com**), we can see which pages interest you and which don't.

This might sound like big brother is watching you, but it's fantastic information that you can use to tune your site content. If you put a page on your site and it gets no hits, you know it hasn't been popular and you can remove it. And if one page gets twice as many hits as any other, you know this is an area you need to expand.

Logfiles are created by the Web server as it responds to requests for HTML pages and graphics files. The details of the request, including the time elapsed since the last request, and the page that's being viewed, are all logged and stored for analysis. It's a huge amount of information. Like most large sites, *Internet Magazine*'s logfiles are far bigger than the site itself. It doesn't take long for them to reach a few Gigabytes in size.

You'll need to run the logfiles through analysis software before it makes any sense. The two most popular pieces of software for this are Analog and WebTrends. Analog is the most widely used logfile analyser in the world. It's also free, and was developed in Britain by Stephen Turner, a Cambridge academic. WebTrends is a far more sophisticated program aimed at professional Web developers.

Neither of these programs are much use if you're not generating logfiles in the first place, and most free or basic site hosting services don't provide this service, because it's too much work. But if you're paying more than £200 a year for your hosting, you should expect access to either your raw logfiles or analysed logfiles. If you don't get this service, start pestering your host or look for a new one.

If you run your own Web server, you'll need to set up your server software to record logfiles in one of the standard formats, and then run an analysis program. For more details, try Analog at **www.statslab.cam.ac.uk/~sret1/analog**.

Program started at Mon-06-Dec-1999 02:40 local time.
Analysed requests from Mon-29-Nov-1999 01:17 to Sun-05-Dec-1999 22:57 (6.9 days).

Total successful requests: 1 827 (1 824)
Average successful requests per day: 265 (260)
Total successful requests for pages: 565 (564)
Average successful requests for pages per day: 82 (80)
Total failed requests: 38 (38)
Total redirected requests: 9 (9)
Number of distinct files requested: 120 (120)
Number of distinct hosts served: 160 (159)
Number of new hosts served in last 7 days: 159
Total data transferred: 20 730 kbytes (20 704 kbytes)
Average data transferred per day: 3 003 kbytes (2 958 kbytes)
(Figures in parentheses refer to the last 7 days).

(Go To: Daily Summary: Hourly Summary: Domain Report: Host Report: Directory Report: File Type Report: Request Report)

General statistics from Analog

We've concentrated on showing you how to interpret logfile analysis reports, since they're notoriously difficult to understand and easy to misinterpret. We've used Analog because it's a common program that won't cost you a penny.

The first thing you'll be interested in is how many people are visiting your site. There's a temptation to look at that lovely big number at the top of the page – Total successful requests – and smile. Don't fall for it. It's a nice high figure to quote at people who

Don't take the figures too literally

Logfile analysis isn't 100 per cent accurate. It's the best guide to what's happening on your site – so it's definitely useful – but don't take the numbers at face value. The two main weaknesses in logfile analysis are cacheing and counting IP addresses

Caches are intermediate servers that are placed on the network between your Web server and your visitors' screens. The important caches are at national level, ISP level, company network level, and on your visitors' own computers.

To keep Internet traffic down to a manageable level, caches hold copies of popular Web pages and send these to visitors rather than letting requests travel the length and breadth of the Internet. Unless your site is tiny, some of your visitor's requests will be dealt with by caches and are therefore invisible to your Web server, so they won't appear in your logfiles.

The effect of this is hard to quantify and varies according to your site. As a guide, between 15 and 35 per cent of your hits are hidden by caches (and this percentage ignores cacheing on your visitors' machines).

The other big weakness with logfile analysis programs is they assume that each IP address associated with a request belongs to a different visitor. This assumption is riddled with holes.

The main problem is most browsers get a different ISP address each time they connect, due to the rolling address system that ISPs use. The same person can visit your site many times, but they're likely to have a different ISP address every time.

Proxy caches at a network level affect your logfile figures in the opposite direction. They use a single IP address for access by tens or hundreds of users. AOL presents yet another problem, because it often gives multiple IP addresses to a single browser at any one time.

All this is impossible to quantify. All you can say for sure is your logfile numbers aren't 100 per cent accurate. The best way to use them is for comparisons over time. If the number of visitors accessing your site doubles in a week, you can forget about the inaccuracies – you know you're doing something right.

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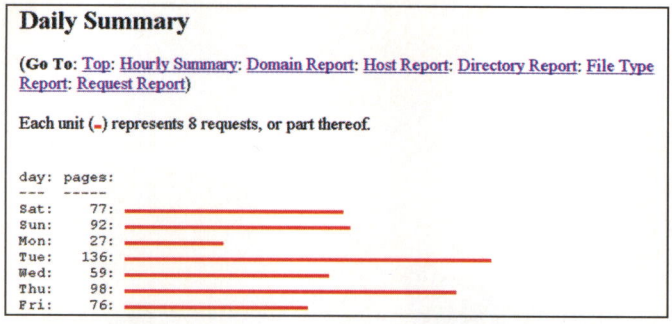


Daily Summary

(Go To: Top: Hourly Summary: Domain Report: Host Report: Directory Report: File Type Report: Request Report)

Each unit (-) represents 8 requests, or part thereof.

```
day:  pages:
---   -----
Sat:     77:
Sun:     92:
Mon:     27:
Tue:    136:
Wed:     59:
Thu:     98:
Fri:     76:
```

Daily summary statistics aren't too informative, unless you get no hits one day, in which case you need to find out whether the Web server went down

don't understand the Internet, but it can be wildly inaccurate. The number of plain hits (or requests as Analog calls them) includes details of all files requested, and that means graphics as well as HTML pages. So if a single HTML page contains 20 small graphics, it gets 21 hits every time it's accessed.

The same page could be redesigned in a slightly different way, with some of the pictures combined, and finish up with just five graphics, generating just six hits when it's accessed. This means the Total successful requests figure would go down, even if the new page proved twice as popular as the old one – a clear demonstration of why you shouldn't read too much into your hits figures.

The figures showing your Total successful requests for pages are far more important. These are commonly known as page impressions and are the statistic that the Internet industry uses every day – either as page impressions per month, week or day. In this case, the figures are 565 per week and 82 per day.

The next statistic, Total failed requests, is also vital. It covers a multitude of errors, including how often your visitors see the dreaded '404 Page not found' error. If you get high numbers here, you need to investigate the problem. You could have broken internal links, or you might have erased a page that a lot of people bookmarked, or linked to, which they can't find any more.

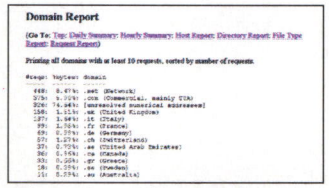
A small number of failed requests is inevitable and no big deal. They can be caused by other people making mistakes on their links into your site, or visitors attempting to type URLs into the address bar and getting them wrong.

In this example, the failure rate is around two per cent of the total requests, which is nothing to worry about. Some sites tolerate failure rates of up to 10 per cent, but this seems rather high.

The next figure to look at is the Number of distinct hosts served. This is an indicator of how many individuals visited your site, though it's hardly precise.

The Total data transferred figure is only important if you have to make an incremental payment to your host for transfers beyond a certain number of bytes. For instance, if you have to pay £5 per 100Mb (a common figure) for transfers above 2Gb a month, you'll need to watch your Total data transferred figure closely as it accelerates past 1.5Gb per month without showing any signs of slowing down.

The next section is the Domain Report. This identifies the origin of requests according to the domain. In other words, are your visitors



Domain Report

(Go To: Top: Daily Summary: Hourly Summary: Host Report: Directory Report: File Type Report: Request Report)

Printing all domains with at least 10 requests, sorted by number of requests.

Where in the world are your hits coming from?

accessing from companies (including ISPs) that use .net at the end of their addresses, or .com, or something else? A .net address could belong to an ISP from almost any nation, so that doesn't tell you a great deal. While .com theoretically corresponds to US companies, many other countries use .com addresses, so all you can say about .com traffic is that most of it comes from American companies.

Unresolved numerical addresses often belong to companies that are practising a modest level of network security and don't want you finding out who they are. This isn't as sinister as it sounds. Usually they don't see why they should broadcast their presence to everybody who looks at logfiles, so they just make it a bit trickier to resolve their addresses. The resolution used by simple logfile analysis programs isn't high powered, though, so they succeed in hiding their identities.

National domains are interesting, but you shouldn't read too much into the figures. They're useful for making comparisons from week to week, and seeing the breadth of global interest in your site, but because .net, .com and unresolved addresses could correspond to any country, the figures aren't absolute.

By looking at the Host Report section you can identify which

Host Report

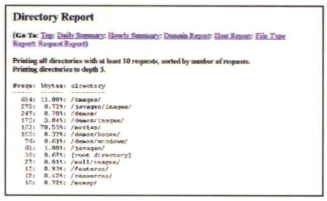
(Go To: Top: Daily Summary: Hourly Summary: Domain Report: Directory Report: File Type Report: Request Report)

Printing all hosts with at least 10 requests, sorted by number of requests.

Who's interested?

visitors have paid a lot of attention to your site and made large numbers of requests. The host names can be worth further investigation. For instance, with a bit of work you can identify the host names of your main commercial competitors and see how often they're thoroughly checking your site. You might need extra tools to help you do this, such as Visual Traceroute (**www.visualroute.com**), a simple lookup system that avoids the technical complexities of Whois, reverse DNS, Tracert and DIG queries.

Assuming your directory structure follows a rational structure, with different subjects carefully separated into different directories, you'll find the Directory Report useful. It tells you which subjects are of most interest to your visitors. If you've been



Directory Report

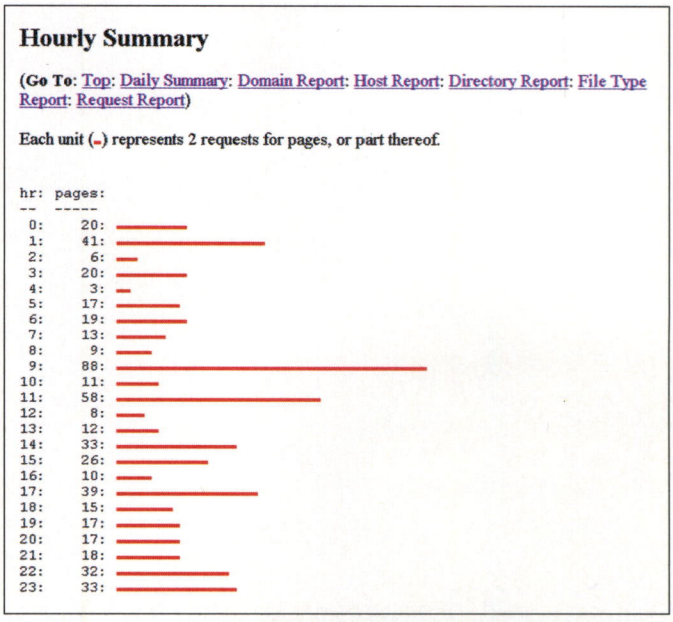
(Go To: Top: Daily Summary: Hourly Summary: Domain Report: Host Report: File Type Report: Request Report)

Printing all directories with at least 10 requests, sorted by number of requests.
Printing directories to depth 3.

Which areas attract most interest?

conscientious and always made sure your images are kept in different directories to your HTML pages, the quality of the information from this section will be particularly good.

In this example, the directories are investigated to depth three, in other words root/directory/subdirectory. It can sometimes be worth investigating to depth four or beyond.



Hourly Summary

(Go To: Top: Daily Summary: Domain Report: Host Report: Directory Report: File Type Report: Request Report)

Each unit (-) represents 2 requests for pages, or part thereof.

```
hr:  pages:
--   -----
 0:     20:
 1:     41:
 2:      6:
 3:     20:
 4:      3:
 5:     17:
 6:     19:
 7:     13:
 8:      9:
 9:     88:
10:     11:
11:     58:
12:      8:
13:     12:
14:     33:
15:     26:
16:     10:
17:     39:
18:     15:
19:     17:
20:     17:
21:     18:
22:     32:
23:     33:
```

Hourly statistics aren't of great value either. All you can tell from this particular set is that most people access the Internet from work, and that the vast majority of Internet users aren't at work in the small hours.

It's common for error data to be kept in a separate logfile to the regular data for file access. This isn't a big deal unless you're creating your own logs, in which case you'll probably have to configure the two systems separately.

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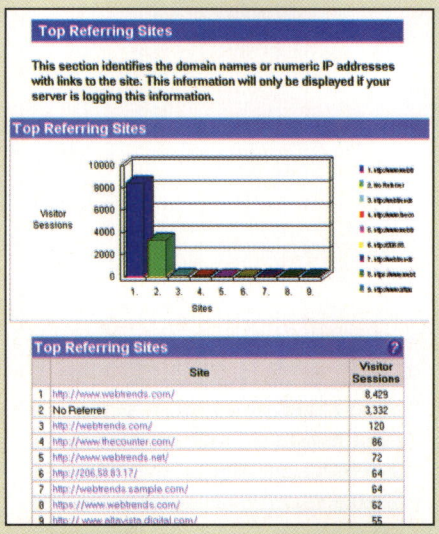
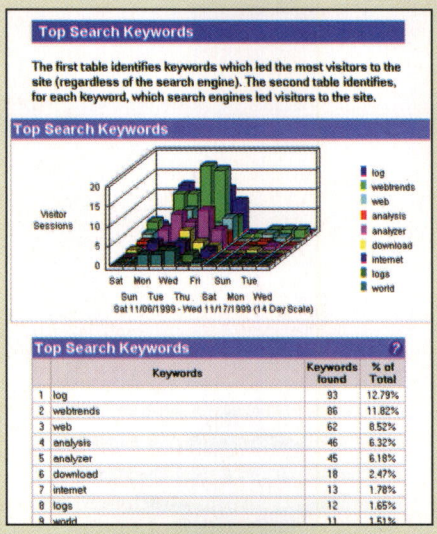
WebTrends

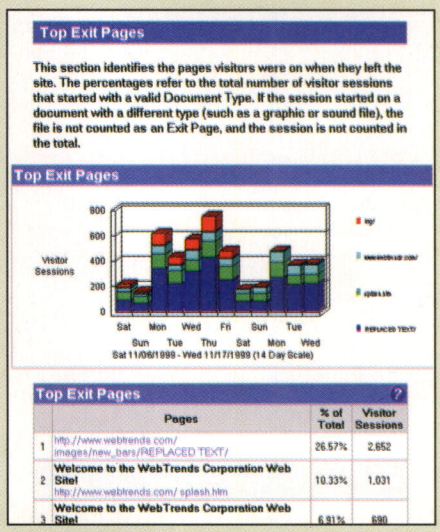
WebTrends is capable of far more analysis than Analog. There's a temptation to take the results of this program more seriously because it costs money and it can do clever things. But most of the caveats that apply to Analog also apply to WebTrends. It supplies best guesses about how people are accessing your site. It doesn't give 100 per cent accurate results, because it doesn't start with 100 per cent accurate data.



WebTrends tells you where your visitors were before they came to your site



You can also identify the search terms that people are using to reach your site

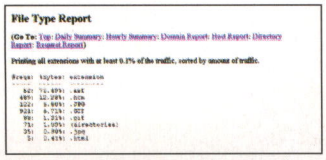


You can also identify where visitors leave your site. It's normal for the first few pages to suffer the greatest losses

One of WebTrends' more interesting features is the Page Referrer section. Many people are surprised to learn that when they access a Web page their browser tells the Web server what page it was looking at before. This is called the Referring Page. WebTrends collates these statistics to give a picture of where your visitors came from.

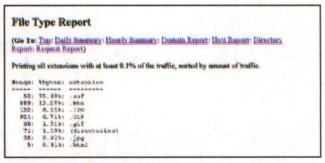
In the example, most of the referrals are internal or unknown. Fourth on the list is **www.thecounter.com**, which obviously has a link to the site, and eighth on the list is **www.altavista.digital.com**, the search engine. You can also find out what search term your visitors have used to arrive at your site via a search engine. It's embedded in the CGI code that's part of the referring page URL. For instance, if you use Google (**www.google.com**) to search for *Internet Magazine*, the search results will arrive in a page with the URL **www.google.com/search?q=internet+magazine**. WebTrends extracts these terms from the Page Referrer data to tell you the search terms and keywords that are bringing visitors to your site.

Under File Type Report you'll find access details according to file extensions. In this example, a little trick has been played on the analysis program to squeeze more information out of it. Some of the GIFs have been mounted on the Web server with extensions in upper case, and others in lower case (gif). Both cases work in browsers, but Analog separates them. You can do the same with JPG or HTML (and HTM). Used carefully, this technique can give you a bit more information about where visitors are going on your site.



What kind of files are most popular?

You can spend a long time looking at the Request Report. It lists the most popular files, usually dominated, as they are here, by graphics that appear on more than one Web page. The most popular HTML files are usually indexes,



More detail on what attracts visitors

and that's the case in the example (demos.demos.htm is an index).

The Request Report can run to hundreds of lines, but it's worth taking the time to check it thoroughly. Look for your most popular 'end' pages – those that aren't part of your navigation system but are destinations in themselves. The entry for '/' shows how many people have arrived at the opening page of your site through requesting your base URL.

As long as you don't take them too literally, logfile reports are wonderful aids to adjusting your site and turning it into a winner. In a strange way, they're a bit like a share price – they're an indication of how much interest the market has in you. Just as companies wouldn't dream of ignoring their share price, you can't afford to ignore your logfiles.

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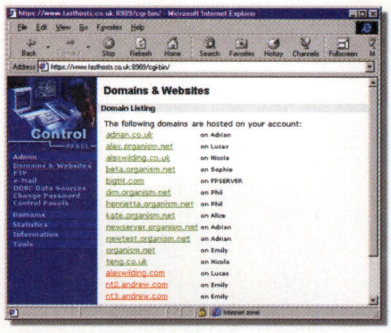

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- Seperate Control Panel for each of your domains

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tried &tested

This month's reviews// labs test / software / hardware / ISPs

In Tried & Tested

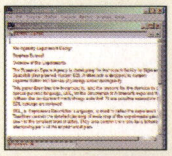
Internet Magazine is committed to bringing you the best and most authoritative reviews in the Internet industry. Every month we test and rate the most important new Internet products. If you're making a buying decision or doing a bit of pre-purchase research, the following pages are not to be missed.

In Tried & Tested you'll find comprehensive, comparative labs tests, reviews of the hottest Net products, and our exclusive ISP performance tests.

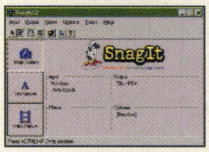
The Sharp VN-EZ1 lets you create instant Web movies for your site
See page 133

Key reviews for February

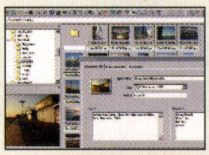
This month's labs test looks at alternative browsers – fast programs that you can also use on old, low spec computers
See page 122



Webwriter is one of the first XML editors on the market. Despite this, it does an excellent job of creating XML documents for the Web
See page 131

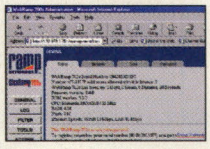


SnagIt lets you capture text, graphics and movies from the Web. It's a useful utility that was flawless in testing
See page 133



More image files than you know what to do with? The useful ACDSee thumbnail viewer will organise them for you
See page 134

The Eicon DIVA USB is an affordable, high quality ISDN modem that you can use at home or on the move
See page 134



Protect your home or business network using WebRamp 700s
See page 136

NeoTrace lets you map the route your data takes over the Net
See page 136

February 2000 internet magazine ISP of the Month

Our exclusive ISP tests are the biggest and the best. Don't choose an ISP until you've seen the results
See page 138

And find the best performing Web hosting companies in our tests
See page 145

Star Ratings

★★★★★	Must buy
★★★★½	Should buy
★★★½	Could buy
★★½	Poor buy
★½	Don't buy

The choice is yours

Alternative browsers

You don't have to use Internet Explorer or Netscape to browse the Web – you can get simple, fast alternatives that'll also work on old, low spec computers. Richard Baguley and the labs team review alternative browsers

When people talk about browser wars, they often assume it means the competition between Netscape and Internet Explorer. After all, these browsers are the two big players, so they must be the best, right? Not necessarily – it depends what you use the Internet for.

While Netscape and Explorer are good programs, there are plenty of alternative browsers available, and some of these are better for certain types of Internet use.

The alternative browsers in this labs test are small, fast and don't require the latest expensive hardware or masses of memory. They don't require huge downloads that take several hours to transfer and they don't take up your valuable hard disk space.

You can also find browsers that don't assume you always prefer content to presentation.

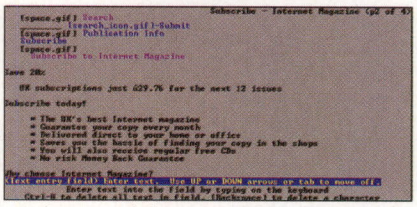
The downside

There is a downside to these alternative programs. As they're smaller and more basic than Netscape and Explorer, some features have been sacrificed, such as support for DHTML or (in some cases) Java.

If you try to load a page that contains a Java Applet into Opera, for instance, you'll just get a blank space where the Applet should be (unless you download the Sun Java plug-in – all 9Mb of it). Likewise, pages that use tables won't look their best in Lynx (a text-only browser), and some of these programs only understand earlier versions of the HTML standard.

Most pages will look fine in these browsers, and losing the fancy stuff increases the speed at which you can download and display Web pages. Lynx is probably the fastest browser we've seen because it ignores images and only downloads text.

Most of the programs in this labs test don't come with built-in email programs or support for Usenet news, both of which are included with Explorer and Navigator. But you're unlikely to miss these features because they use a separate email program, such as Eudora.



Lynx is a text-only browser, so it's ideal for accessing Web pages that consist mainly of text, such as news sites

It might sound like you'd have to compromise in order to use these programs, but this isn't necessarily the case. How often have you used the video conferencing software that was included with Internet Explorer? Have you ever used the Netscape Web page designer? And do you really need the VRML plug-in that came with your browser?

For most people, the answer to all of these questions is no. Netscape and Explorer add new features to go with their browsers to encourage you to their program, but we've only come across a few people that use these extra features. Most extraneous features just sit there on your computer hogging disk space. It's rather like Office Suites and Word processors – people buy the latest versions of the software, but they don't use the new features.

Teaching an old PC new tricks

The other main benefit of these browsers is you can run them on low specification computers. You might have an older machine in the loft that you've replaced with a newer, faster model, but you could give your old machine a new lease of life by using an alternative browser to access the Net.

You can use programs such as Lynx and Opera on Windows 3.1 (or, with Lynx, older versions of DOS), and they don't require much power or memory, so you could use your older machine as a dedicated Web browsing computer. This means, for instance, that you could use the Internet while your children are busy blowing each other up in Quake on your main computer.

Better than the rest

The fundamental question is, given the memory and processing power, would you want to dump Explorer or Netscape to use any of these programs? The answer is a qualified no. NeoPlanet is basically an enhanced version of Explorer, so you might want to try it first if you think the extra features, such as better searching and online communities,

How popular are these browsers?

While there are some excellent alternatives to Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer, the vast majority of people use these two programs to navigate the Web. Browserwatch, the browser news and information site (at http://browserwatch.internet.com), keeps a record of the browsers that its visitors use.

Just over half (52.5 per cent) of its visitors use Internet Explorer. Around a third (32.3 per cent) of its users are Netscape users, leaving around 15 per cent for other browsers.

Browser Types Visiting BrowserWatch (Must Have .25% Share Or Better)

Browser	Value	Percent
Microsoft Internet Explorer	14237	52.7%
Netscape Navigator	8757	32.4%
Science Traveller International 1X	738	2.73%
IBrowse	483	1.79%
Opera	450	1.66%
Powermarks-3.0 (compatible; Powermarks	444	1.64%
AOL	217	0.80%
indexpert	189	0.70%
Cyberdog	159	0.58%
Lynx	118	0.43%
MSProxy	66	0.24%

Browserwatch produces a range of statistics on the browsers that people use for navigating the Web

But these figures don't necessarily mean the Internet's dominated by Explorer – they only measure the people coming to the BrowserWatch site). As an example, though, it shows that the vast majority of users are using the big two browsers, with only a few using the others.

might be useful. Opera requires far less memory than Explorer or Netscape, so it's worth considering if the memory on your computer is getting tight because you're running several programs at once.

The other situation where programs like Opera or 1X might be useful would be on a laptop computer, which has less memory and processing power than a desktop computer. The smaller browsers will give you quicker browsing once you're connected to the Net and leave more memory for your other programs.

Whatever kind of browser you are, these programs are certainly worth considering, even if it's just to convince yourself that you're happy with Explorer or Netscape.

In these days of huge feature lists and multi-Megabyte downloads, it's refreshing to see programs being designed by people who believe less is more.

Other browser alternatives

There are several other browsers that we didn't have space to feature in this labs test. Here's the best of the rest:

Mosaic

Produced by the NCSA (the National Center for Supercomputing Applications), Mosaic was the first graphics browser on the Web. It was also the project that got Marc Andreessen involved in the Web before he founded Netscape. The project ended in 1997, but you can still download the browser for a variety of platforms from **www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/Software/Mosaic/NCSAMosaicHome.html**. You can even download the source code and have a go at writing your own version of the program.

AOL browser

At first glance, you might think AOL's browser is an alternative program, but it's simply a rebadged version of Internet Explorer. This is odd when you think AOL spent several billion dollars buying Netscape last year, but it has a long-term agreement to keep using Explorer as the basis of its browser for the foreseeable future.

www.aol.co.uk

Mozilla

Netscape decided in 1998 that it'd release the source code to Navigator and ask programmers to contribute their own ideas and bits of code. It pulled together the best ideas to form a new browser. The project was named Mozilla (the pet name for the dinosaur mascot in Netscape's early days), and is ongoing, but you can download a beta test version from **www.mozilla.org**.

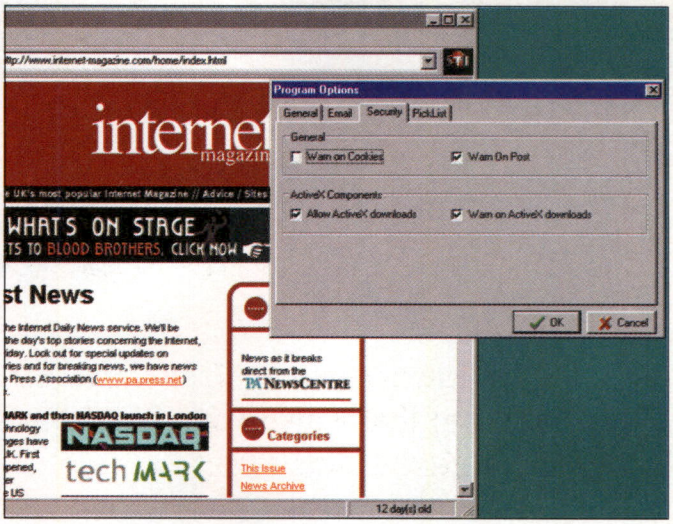
Web TV

Microsoft's WebTV includes its own browser, but it doesn't always make a job of rendering pages correctly

Microsoft's Web TV is a device for accessing the Internet without having to use a PC, and it uses its own proprietary Web browser that's different to Internet Explorer. But you don't have to buy a WebTV unit to try it – Microsoft's released a WebTV viewer program that simulates the WebTV browser. You can download the WebTV viewer for a PC or Mac from **http://developer.webtv.net/design/tools/viewer**.

SCIENCE TRAVELLER INTERNATIONAL

1X



This is only a beta test version of 1X, but it already looks like an excellent browser

A promising new browser with support for Microsoft's ActiveX standard

The 1X browser has been designed in the same mould as Opera – smaller, better and faster. It's called 1X because it was designed to fit onto a floppy disk. It just manages this – the installer is 1.3Mb.

The program takes a minimalist approach – it's a good Web browser without the fancy additional features that make Explorer and Netscape so large. The interface takes the same no-frills approach – all you get is a browser window, six buttons and a URL box.

The unique selling point is the support for Microsoft's ActiveX standard. There's been some controversy about this – some people think ActiveX is a huge security problem, because an ActiveX control (the program you download) can do almost whatever it wants on your machine, including changing settings and deleting files.

But others see this as a benefit – an ActiveX control can do more than Java, which makes things like accessing databases far easier. It's a complex argument, but you can do some cool things with ActiveX, and this is the only browser in this labs test that supports it.

Whether 1X is right for you depends on the kind of sites you visit. But it has some great features – if you go to a page that requires an ActiveX control (such as a page with Flash), the program will download and install the control for you. There's also support for frames, tables and Cascading Style Sheets – but no Java support.

As a Web browser, 1X is excellent. It only uses a small amount of your memory and disk space, and does a good job of displaying Web pages. There's the odd quirk, but it managed to deal with almost every page we asked it to display. The program crashed occasionally, but not too much.

A useful feature will synchronise your PC clock with an atomic clock over the Intern et. You can use Finger – an old Internet standard – to retrieve a short text file from a server, such as the number of coke cans left in a coke machine, or a short daily message. You get built-in support for Cascading Style Sheets, sending email (but not receiving it) and a bookmarking system.

We've reviewed the test beta version 0.9 of 1X. You'll need the OSR2 version of Windows 95, Windows 98 or NT to run the program. This means you can't use it on a low-end machine. But for such a small browser, 1X does an excellent job and it's definitely a program to keep your eye on.

★★★★☆

1X
Price *Free*
Pros *ActiveX support, small and easy to use*
Cons *ActiveX support, occasional crashes*
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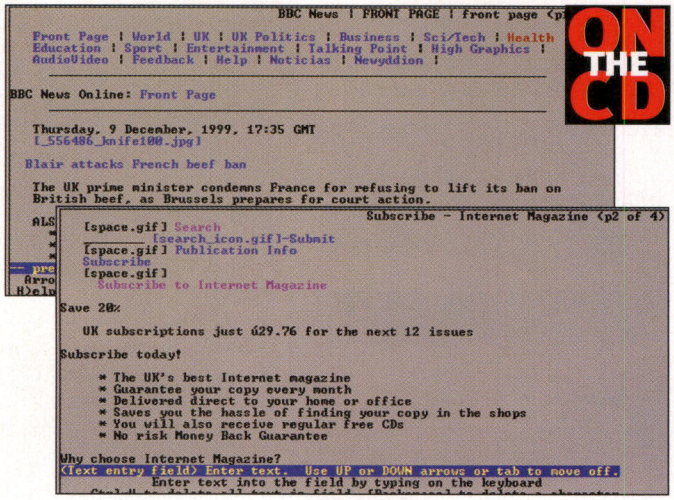
VARIOUS

Lynx



ON THE CD

With a text-only interface, Lynx won't win any beauty prizes, but it does the job

If you get rid of graphics on the Web, you're left with fast, text-only browsing

Lynx is the smallest Web browser in this labs test. It doesn't download images – all you see on a Web page is text, which makes browsing incredibly fast. Lynx only has to download a small text file (the HTML file), so it takes seconds to download pages that take much longer with other browsers.

You have to use your cursor keys to navigate a Web page with Lynx – there's no mouse support. Web links are shown in blue, while the link you're on is shown in red. The up and down cursor keys move through the links, while the left and right keys move you backwards and forwards through the list of accessed pages.

Lynx doesn't support frames or tables, but it does support forms, so you can still use things like search buttons. There's no support for encryption, so you shouldn't enter things like your credit card details into this program. But Lynx will warn you if a Web site tries to set a cookie (a small file stored on your computer that tells a site about your patterns and preferences) and gives you the option to allow or block the cookie.

The program will work with image maps, but it won't download the image. Instead, it processes the file and presents you with a list of text links.

You can set other configuration settings in the options screen or by editing the lynx.cfg file. You get a selection of help files that do a good job of explaining the intricacies of the program, and there's an active community of helpful users and programmers. You can also download the full source code – try doing this with Explorer.

Lynx is available on most computer platforms, including Amiga, OS/2, and various versions of Unix and Linux. We reviewed the Win32 version of Lynx, which you can get from **www.fdisk.com/doslynx/wlynx**. If you can't get a version of Lynx that's compatible with your computer, you can always download the source code and compile it yourself.

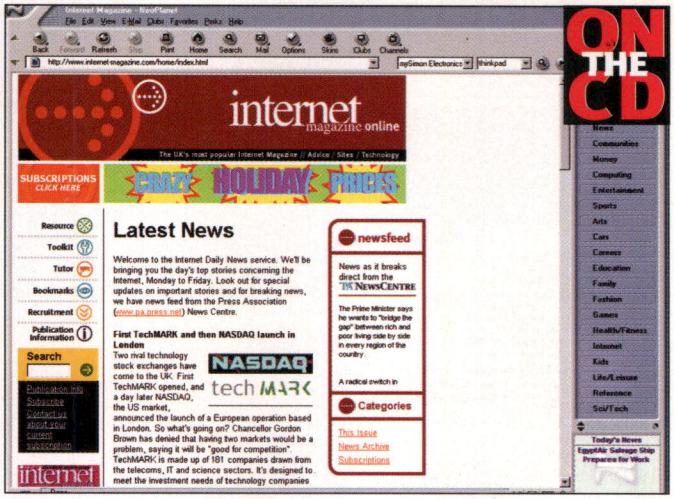
The text-only approach will deter some people, and the formatting of the page (which often makes it unrecognisable from the original) could be a pain. But Lynx has all the essential elements you need from a simple Web browser, and you can use it on a low spec computer (the minimum requirement for the DOS version is a 386, 16MHz machine with 2Mb of memory). This makes it ideal if you have an old computer in the garage that you want to dust off and use for alternative access (such as the kids) to the Internet.

★★★☆☆

Lynx
Price *Free*
Pros *Small, fast*
Cons *No graphics, no tables or frames*
Contact *Various – see below*
www.crl.com/~subir/lynx/platforms.html

NEOPLANET

NeoPlanet 5



ON THE CD

A Web design program that's particularly suited to younger designers

A version of Internet Explorer, with its own set of features and customisable options

NeoPlanet is a rebadged, slightly cut-down version of Internet Explorer, with a few extra features on the side. The company describes it as the Internet desktop, and aims to bring together everything you need to browse the Net in one place.

You get a channels bar at the side, a continually updated news window (with some advertising) and a search button at the top of the screen. The channels bar is a collection of links to Web sites that you can customise or update through NeoPlanet's site.

There's a good selection of themes on the site, including careers, cars, computing and kids. If you click on the channels toolbar on the site, it automatically updates the toolbar. The new window features news headlines from a variety of sources. You view a story by clicking on the headline and the story pops up in your main browser window.

The search tool is useful – you enter a word or phrase, select the search engine you want to use (there are 12 built-in engines to choose from) and click on Find.

The program generates the search query and comes back to you with the results in your maih browser window. The program needs to add more search engines though – the online shopping searches, for instance, only give you results from US sites.

You can change the look of NeoPlanet with the skins feature. In a similar way to Winamp, you can add a new skin to change the way it looks. This doesn't change the position of the buttons or the toolbar – it just adds a custom paint job to the program. It's a nice touch, but hardly earth-shattering.

You also get built-in support for Lycos clubs – a popular online community system. But you can manage this within any Web browser, so there's nothing unique about this. As you'd imagine, the browser itself is good, as it's based on IE4. You get the usual features – relatively fast Web browsing, email and access to Usenet news.

NeoPlanet is an odd program. It's not bad at what it does, but the features won't make you scramble to download it. There are some nice touches (such as the themed channels and the search button), but nothing that can't be done with Explorer or Communicator and a bit of tweaking.

It's a bit smaller than both of these programs and does a good job of pulling its features together to form a single interface. But there's no unique reason to download NeoPlanet instead of Explorer.

★★★☆☆

NeoPlanet 5
Price *Free*
Pros *Fairly small download, some nice features*
Cons *No unique selling point*
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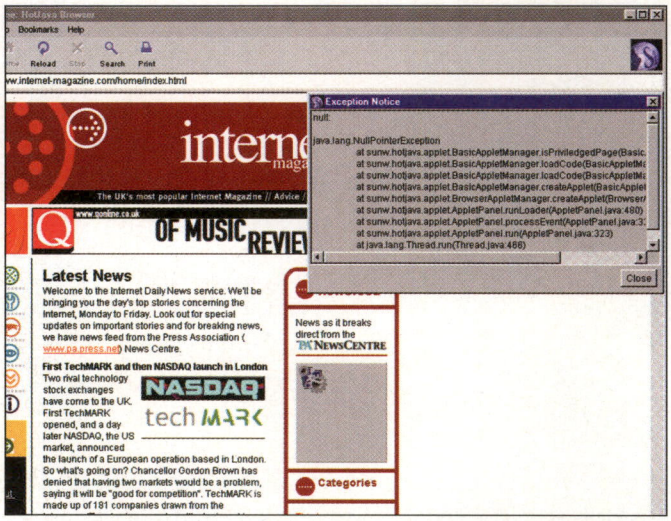
www.neoplanet.com

JAVASOFT

HotJava 3



HotJava is a nice browser, but it has some problems, like this crashing Java applet

A good example of Java in action, but can this browser compete with the best?

The HotJava browser is written completely in Java. It demonstrates the power of Sun's cross platform Java language because you can use it on any type of computer that understands Java.

Java has a reputation for being slow because it's an interpreted language, which means your computer has to translate the program's instructions as it executes them. But this problem doesn't seem to apply to HotJava – it's just as fast as the other browsers in this labs test and doesn't require much computing power.

As with Opera, it lets you send email, but you can't receive email or access Usenet program, and you can't use Netscape plug-ins or ActiveX components. It does run Java applets, though, so most of the fancy menu items that Web designers use will be compatible.

Encryption is also supported, including the HTTPS protocol for encrypting credit card numbers and personal details that have been entered into Web pages. As with all US programs, the encryption's restricted to 40-bit keys.

HotJava can also launch viewer programs when it encounters content of a particular type – for instance, it'll launch RealPlayer if you click on a link to streaming video. You can add new content viewers through the preferences screen. You can also choose to block cookies, change fonts and alter the browser's home page.

But while HotJava demonstrates some of the good things about Java, it also shows some of its problems. The PA newswire Java Applet that we use on the *Internet Magazine* home page (**www.internet-magazine.com /home /index.html**) crashed in HotJava, despite working perfectly in every other Java-compatible browser we could find.

It also seems to have a problem with large pages. When we tried to load a page with an 80k HTML file, the browser got extremely slow and eventually refused to display the bottom part of the page.

Other browsers display Web pages as soon as the files start to download. But HotJava waits for an entire page – and all the images – to download before you can see anything. A small percentage counter shows you how the downloaded page is progressing.

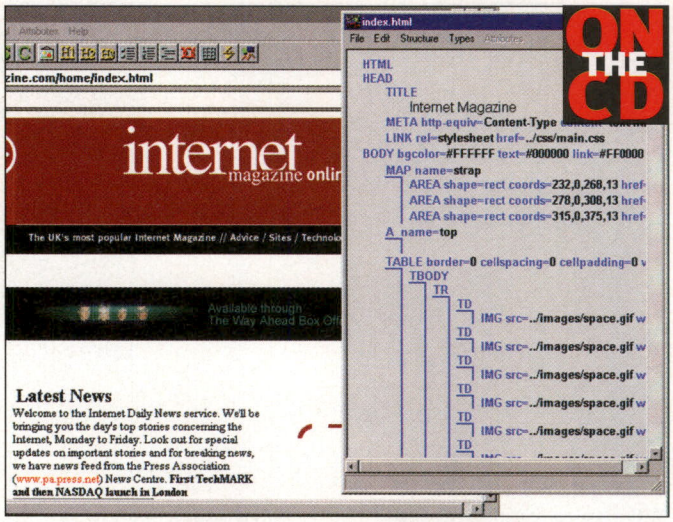
HotJava does a good job of demonstrating how Java can be used to write large programs. This makes it an interesting browser, but it doesn't come near Opera, and you'll only find it useful if you're a hardcore Java freak.

★★★☆☆

HotJava 3
Price *Free*
Pros *A good demonstration of Java in action*
Cons *Several bugs and problems*
Contact *JavaSoft*
Phone *(1800) 786 7638*
http://Java.sun.com

W3C

Amaya 2.2



Amaya is a browser and WYSIWYG design program that tests new Web standards

This program from W3C could be ideal for Web designers and developers

Amaya is a testing browser for new standards, such as the new version of XHTML. It's produced by W3C (the Word Wide Web Consortium), the body that creates standards for Web pages. W3C encourages companies to produce browsers together, and to work out how new innovations in Web design should work in theory. Amaya is how they demonstrate the standards in practice.

It's a combination of a Web browser and a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) Web design program, and lets you view pages as you create them. You can load a page, edit it in your browser window and post the result back to the Web server. The program also includes support for the new standards that W3C is working on. It can edit pages, but there's no support for Java, ActiveX, Netscape plug-ins, or sending and receiving email.

Version 2.2 of Amaya supports a new standard called MathML, which lets you create mathematical equations on Web pages. The standard is still being created, but Amaya lets you create Web pages that use MathML – so you can see how it's going to work when it appears in other Web browsers. This feature makes Amaya an essential program for Web designers who want to stay one step ahead by keeping up with the latest innovations in Web design.

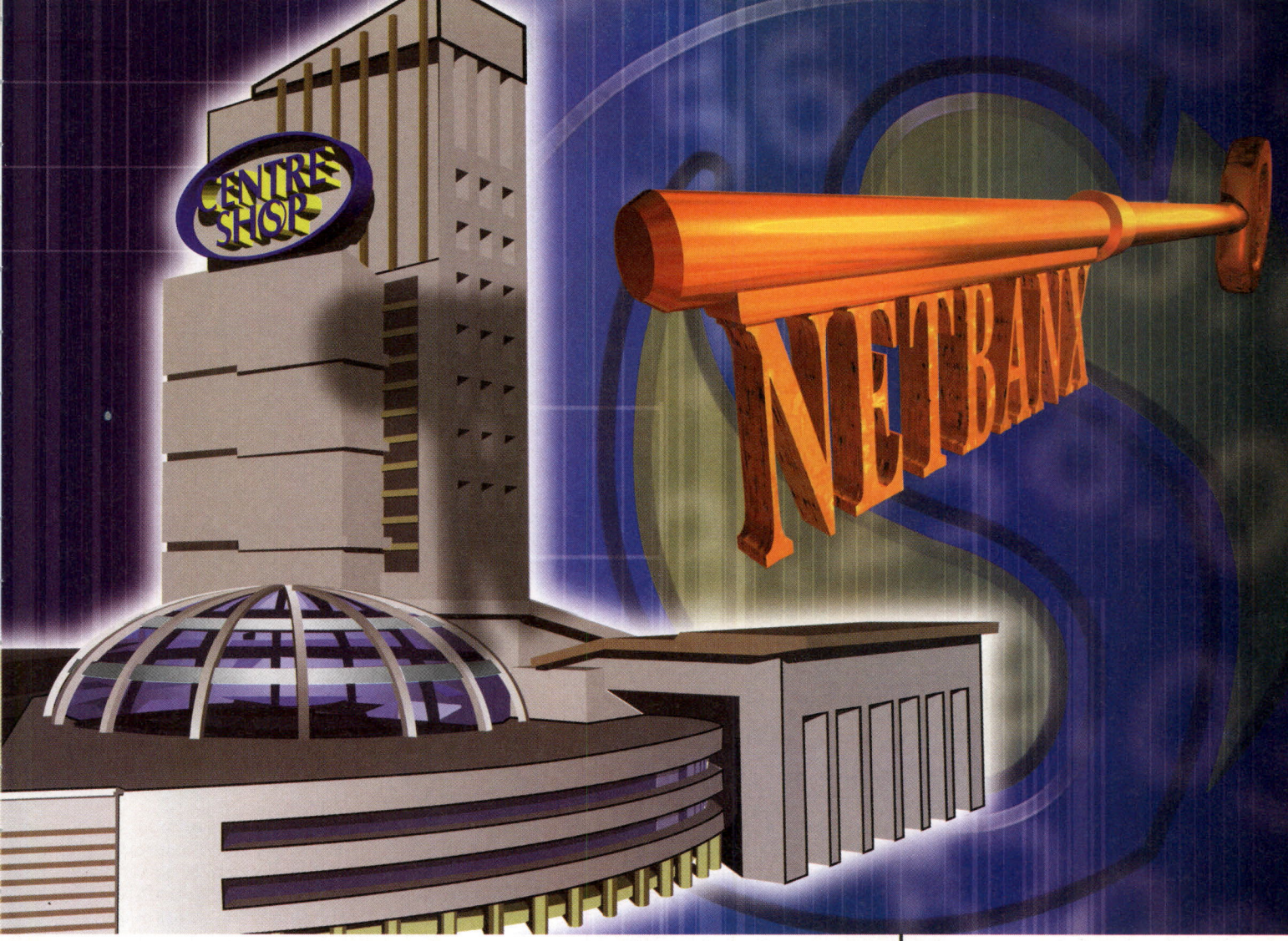
If you're not a Web designer, Amaya probably isn't for you. It sticks rigidly to the HTML standards, so many pages can look scrambled. Many designers use the foibles of browser programs to produce their Web pages, but Amaya doesn't always support these foibles, so the results are often different from the intended design. The same problem occurs with browser companies who've written their own standards.

Amaya is created by a smaller team than most browsers, so there are some bugs in it which wouldn't have got past the testing teams at the big browser companies. The program crashed several times on different testing machines in our labs. It also had an annoying habit of losing graphics when you scroll down to the bottom of a Web page and back up again.

Amaya is an essential program for Web designers who want to get familiar with new standards before they become widespread. This program will give you a head start over your rivals because you'll know how to use the standard on your Web pages. But this browser isn't really suitable for more general use – it simply isn't stable enough.

★★★☆☆

Amaya 2.2
Price *Free*
Pros *Supports new standards before anybody else*
Cons *Not stable enough, doesn' t render most pages very well*
Contact *W3C*
Phone *(01235) 446 822*
www.w3c.org



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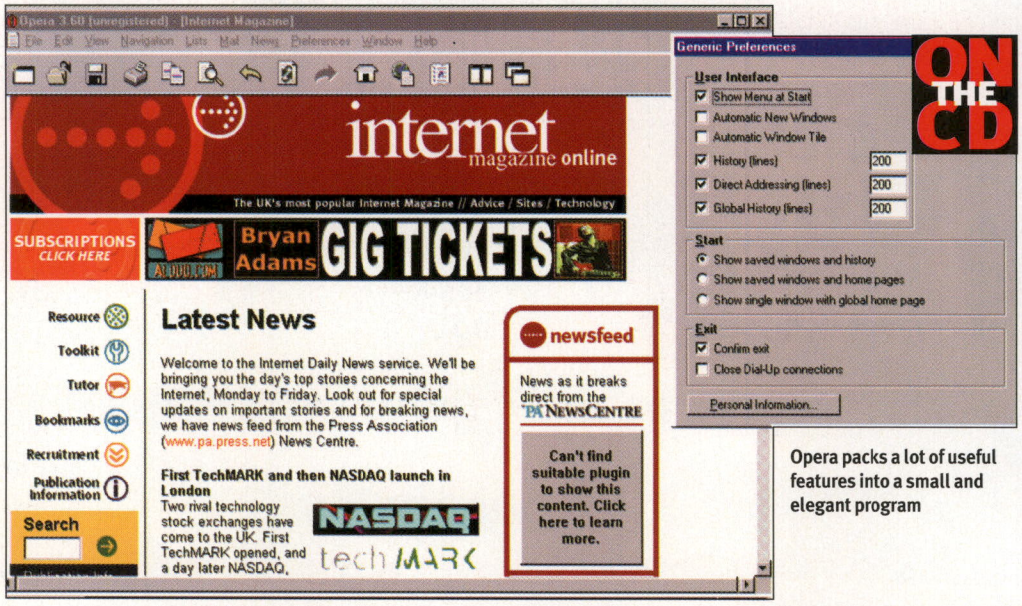
OPERA SOFTWARE

Opera 3.6

This renowned browser might be small, but it's near perfectly formed



Opera packs a lot of useful features into a small and elegant program

If you're a regular reader of *Internet Magazine* you'll know we're big fans of Opera – it's small, it doesn't use much memory and it's fast. The entire installer program for the latest version of Opera is only 1.3Mb, so you can even put it on a floppy disk. Once you've installed it, the program only uses 1.7Mb of your hard disk space – Opera Software claims it'll run on a 386SX computer with only 6Mb of RAM.

You might think this'd involve compromises over the speed and quality of the program, but this isn't the case. The program's fast and includes most of the features you're ever likely to need for browsing the Web. There's support for the HTML standard – up to version 3.2 – plus full support for frames, tables, forms and even Cascading Style Sheets.

You also get support for 128-bit encryption, making the Web pages you visit more secure – Netscape and Internet Explorer only use 40-bit encryption.

Opera has plenty of other good features – it lets you navigate using your keyboard (rather than your mouse – useful if you're browsing with a laptop), zoom in and out of pages (useful for people with poor eyesight) and open several documents at once.

The program can even pre-fetch all of the Web pages and images in a particular location with just a couple of mouse clicks, or refresh all of the open Web pages with one key.

Java is only supported through the Sun Java plug-in (which you have to install separately), and some of the newer HTML standards (such as DTML) aren't supported. Frankly, Sun's Java plug-in is a pain, and while you can get instructions in the excellent Opera help file, it's certainly not for the faint-hearted. It's also rather ironic that the download for the Java plug-in is 7.9 Mb – over six times larger than the browser itself.

You get a built-in mail program with Opera, but it can only send email – it can't receive it. The program's mainly designed for sending email after you've clicked on an email link on a Web page. This is fine – you should use a dedicated program, such as Eudora, for email.

In case you hadn't guessed, we like Opera. It does most of the things you need without creating a huge program that takes an age to download. It won't satisfy everyone (some people will find the lack of Java support a problem), but it'll be good enough for most people using the Net. If you've only got a limited amount of memory or disk space on your computer, it's a godsend.

★★★★★

February 2000 internet magazine Best Buy

Opera 3.6
Price *$35 (around £23)*
Pros *Doesn't take much disk space or memory*
Cons *No native Java support*
Contact *Opera Software*
Phone *(47) 2323 4868*
www.opera.com

Alternative browsers compared

Browser	Publisher	Platforms	Cost	Download size	Frames	Forms	Tables	Java	JavaScript encryption	SSL Level	HTML	Usenet
NeoPlanet 5	NeoPlanet	Windows	Free	3.5Mb	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Opera 3.6	Opera	Windows, Linux, BeOs, OS/2	£23.00	1.3 Mb	✔	✔	✔	✘	✔	✔	3.2	✔
Lynx	Various	Windows, DOS, Linux, BeOs, OS/2 etc.	Free	658k	✘	✔	✘	✘	✘	✘	2	✘
Amaya 2.2	W3C	Windows, Unix	Free	4.57Mb	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	4	✘
1X	STI	Windows	Free	1.3Mb	✔	✔	✔	✘	✘	✘	3.2	✘
HotJava 3	JavaSoft	Any with Java support	Free	4.9Mb	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	3.2	✘

Conclusion: which is the best?

The browsers we've tested cover a wide variety of options and features. This means there are plenty of other good ways to access the Internet, despite what Microsoft and Netscape tell you.

The outstanding product of this labs test is Opera. It's an excellent browser without the bloat that's turned the big two browsers into monsters which take hours or days to download over a dial-up connection. It has most of the features you'll need and it's fast enough to be your first-choice browser. The only downside is the lack of Java support, but most browsers won't miss this.

A close second is 1X from Scientific Traveller International. It's another fast, small program, and could mature into an excellent browser. An honourable mention goes to Lynx, which is still a good product despite its age.

Many people will turn their nose up at a text-only browser, but they're fast and compact, and you can use them on all sorts of computers – even early versions of DOS.

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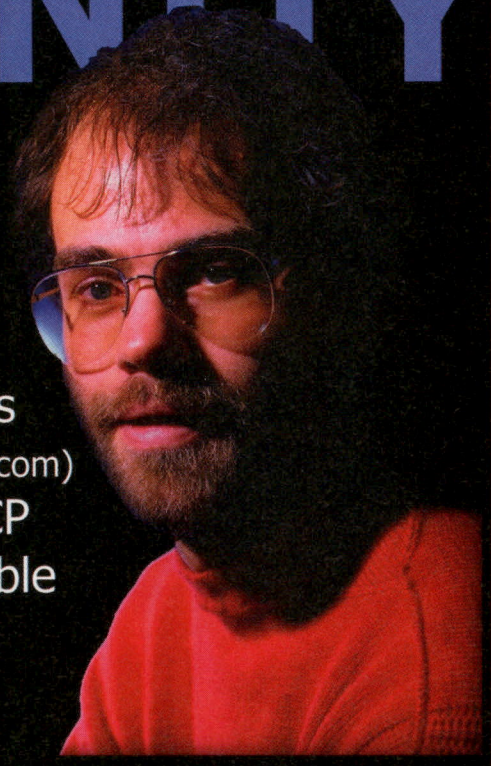

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New Products February

This month, we review a sound and image recorder, a thumbnail viewer, a top of the range ISDN modem, firewall hardware and a utility to track Internet data

XML EDITOR

Webwriter

This XML editor from Stilo is excellent for creating documents for the Web

As the markup language of the Web, HTML has, until now, been used for designing the layout and formatting of text and image data. But with Web applications spreading into diverse areas and demanding powerful tools, a more adaptable language was needed.

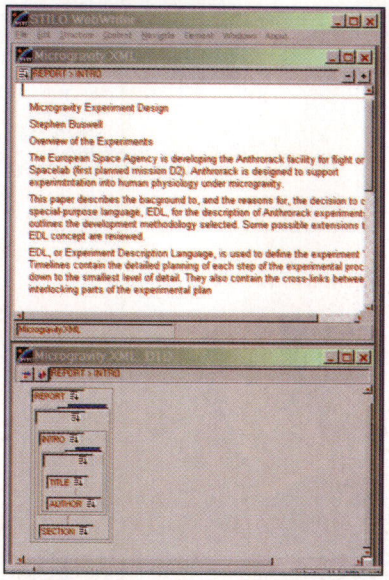
This was achieved in early 1998, when W3C (the World Wide Consortium at **www.w3c.org**) released a new language, called eXtensible Markup Language, to overcome the rigidity of HTML.

While the only browser currently supporting XML is IE5, the other main players will be introducing fully compliant browsers in the near future. In the meantime, you can start to familiarise yourself with the programming intricacies of XML with Webwriter.

It's one of the first XML editors on the market and comes from Stilo (**www.stilo.com**). Webwriter is a robust program, but it appears to have literally rolled off the beta test line considering the bare functionality of the workspace. The program lets you prepare all the elements of an XML document – including the DTD (Document Type Description) – and output the document as either XML or HTML.

A tour of the package using your browser in both HTML and XML takes you through all the aspects of designing valid and well formed documents. Webwriter has some particularly useful features, including partial parsing and document content validation. Full parsing of documents is only carried out when the document is loaded, though.

The tour shows you basic XML document design using a telephone message system as an example. This includes assigning customised content styles – which is unique to Webwriter – and outputting the document as well formed or valid XML, or HTML with an associated CSS file.



Webwriter helps you to learn about XML with an invaluable tour of the package

Anyone studying XML will appreciate Webwriter's ability to extract DTDs from documents. It takes away the graft of writing a DTD from scratch, though since the derived DTD isn't perfect, you'll need to do some extra work.

This isn't a beginner's tool for producing XML documents, but the documentation assumes you have sufficient knowledge of document design. In order to get the most from this package, you'll need to sit down and learn XML document design. But once you have this knowledge, you'll be able to use Webwriter to design compliant XML documents with ease.

The potential for XML on the Web is broad, and as specialised subsets of XML, such as MathML, become available for general use, the new standard will only be limited by your imagination. For an example, take a look at Interleaf (**www.interleaf.com**), which is espousing the virtues of XML in e-commerce and data management.

This program's definitely one of the best XML editors available and it's capable of maturing into an industry standard package.

Charlie Young

★★★★☆

Webwriter

Price *$499 (Around £324)*
Pros *More content than any other XML editor available*
Cons *Not for the uninitiated, and not cheap either*
Contact *Stilo Technology*
Phone *(01222) 483 530*
www.stilo.com

What is XML?

XML describes the structure of data, and is the first language to be developed specifically for the Web since HTML. The new standard lets you give custom attributes to every piece of data on a Web page. With XML you can define unique tags and use them for labelling particular packets of data or elements, such as <bread>bagel</bread>.

To use them, you label elements by enclosing them in a pair of tags, just as in HTML. These tags can be set within one another, but the order must always be respected, such as:

```
<address>
<number>21</number>
<street>Pelham Road</street>
<town>London</town>
</address>
```

With this flexibility over HTML, you can use XML to define document structures. An XML document has two aspects – labelled elements and the DTD (Document Type Description).

The DTD is a set of rules assigned to a document. When you load a document, it's compared to the rules in the DTD, ensuring the elements are published appropriately and correctly. This is known as a valid document.

A well formed document conforms specifically to the rules established by XML. By defining the rules, the DTD defines the elements, their content, their relational context and their frequency of use. The content model can be defined as containing :

- Text
- Other elements only (which might individually contain data)
- Text and other elements
- Nothing (known as an empty element)
- Anything

Elements are named, and their use is defined in a declaration. The name lets this and other declarations refer to the elements by name.

The use of an element is defined by the number of times it can be placed within content – this might be once or several times. For instance, the above <address> tags would carry the option of <apartment number>.

Other details of the DTD are:

- Attributes: additional information attached to a particular element
- Entities: data that's referenced from within a document
- Notations: these are used to declare non-XML entities, such as a graphics format

This is only a brief introduction to XML. For more advice and instruction, follow these links:

http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/98/41/index1a.html?tw=xml
www.w3.org/TR/REC-xml
www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Peaks/5957/xml.html
http://xml.com

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SOUND AND IMAGE RECORDER

Sharp VN-EZ1

Create your own movies and put them on your site with this easy to use recorder

The Sharp VN-EZ1 sound and image recorder is small, light, easy to use and takes movies as well as stills. It might suffer from the same problems as most digital cameras – intermediate picture quality and awesome battery consumption – but it's still neat.

News and features editor Steve Hill in a limited edition movie

Using the lowest quality recording standard, you can record more than two hours of movies with a 32Mb memory card. This low quality level is designed for transfer over the Internet at normal modem speeds. At the other end of the scale, high quality movies on the standard 4Mb card are limited to just over one minute, or – in normal quality mode – seven and a half minutes.

To transfer your movies to your computer, you plug the memory card in to the special adaptor and put this in your floppy drive. When you do this for the first time, you'll need to load a special driver into the computer, but it only takes a few minutes.

The movies are recorded in Microsoft's .asf (active streaming format) format, which is read by the Microsoft Windows Media Player. It's an advanced streaming system with high compression using the MPEG 4 protocol. You can mount the movies straight onto your Web site.

In common with most streaming formats, you'll need a bridging file between .asf files and the HTML links that point to them. You can get instructions about how to do this at http://msdn.microsoft.com/workshop/imedia/windowsmedia/abc.asp.

Once you've created this file, your visitors can view your movies with a Windows Media Player plug-in. Unfortunately, the bridging system doesn't appear to work on Netscape browsers at present. But if you want to insert movies into email or watch them on the computer where they're stored, you don't even need the bridging file.

You can edit your movies on your camera or computer using the PixLab software. This isn't an advanced editing suite, but it lets you cut out the expletives you added when you saw the battery low indicator. Rechargable batteries or a mains adaptor will be essential.

Still photos are a bit of an add-on for this camera. The maximum resolution you can get is 640 x 480 pixels, which is low by modern standards. There's a zoom lens for movies, but it doesn't seem to work for still photographs.

The Sharp VN-EZ1 is the same size as a digital camera, but it makes instant Web movies to put straight on your site

The Sharp VN-EZ1 is a simple package with some limitations, but it's ideal if you want to make Web movies without spending a month on a course.

Andrew Starling

★★★★☆

Sharp VN-EZ1

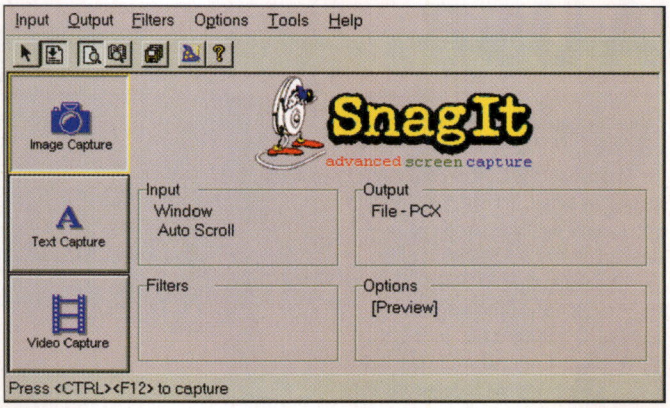
Price *£550 inc VAT*
Pros *Instant, streaming Web movies from an easy to use camera*
Cons *Modest quality pics*
Contact *Sharp UK*
Phone *(0800) 262 958*
www.sharp.co.uk

GRAPHICS UTILITY

SnagIt

Copy graphics, text and movies from the Web with this useful screen capture utility

SnagIt promotes itself as an image capture tool, but it's capable of far more than that. It lets you steal text and video that sites are trying to keep to themselves.



SnagIt lets you capture text and images from the Web, even if sites don't want you to

The main use for this neat little utility is its graphics capture facility. Any GIF, JPEG or PNG that appears on your computer screen can be captured by SnagIt and stored in a variety of image formats.

A good choice of format is PCX (PC Paintbrush), which is one of the most compact formats available. You can capture whole HTML pages in the same way. Best of all, if the HTML page you're trying to copy is too big to fit on your screen, SnagIt will automatically scroll down until it gets the whole lot.

This takes its capabilities beyond the usual default screen capture method of pressing Alt and Print Scrn, and pasting the resulting clipboard into Paint – where you can save it as a BMP. With SnagIt you can choose which bit of the screen to capture, and you finish up with a more compact file. You can also change the DPI (dots per inch) at the time of capture.

As a background program – and one that interferes with screen rendering – SnagIt runs the risk of causing computer conflicts and crashes. But it's so well designed that this kind of problem never happens. We tested it thoroughly under many different circumstances and it performed flawlessly. One competitor managed to disgrace itself so thoroughly that its software barely managed 15 minutes on the computer before it was uninstalled.

You can also set up SnagIt to capture text. This isn't necessary in most circumstances, since the normal Copy function works perfectly well. But some Web sites don't want you to copy their text and try to hide it using various methods, including disabling the Copy function or writing the text into Java. SnagIt can deal with the first method, but not the second.

Slightly more useful is the movie facility. Anything that moves on your screen can be captured by SnagIt as an AVI movie. You can therefore capture all those Web videos that stream to your screen, but you can't save them to your hard disk. But to capture the sound as well you'll need an extra bit of software called DubIt, from the same company.

You can also capture normal screen operations – such as opening applications and moving your cursor – as AVI movies. This has potential for writing training aids and for creating help files.

But all these extras are just icing on the cake. The main business of SnagIt is capturing screenshots and long HTML pages as GIFs, JPEGs or PCX files, and it performs this function admirably well.

Andrew Starling

★★★★★

SnagIt

Price *$40 (Around £26)*
Pros *The main program is flawless*
Cons *The extra facilities for movies and text are limited*
Contact *Techsmith*
www.techsmith.com

IMAGE VIEWER

ACDSee 3

More image files than you know what to do with? Try this thumbnail viewer

February 2000 internet magazine Best Buy

With the advent of cheap digital cameras, scanners and multiple Gigabyte hard drives, you can end up with a computer full of hundreds of images that are lost in a mountain of sub directories.

ACDSee is a fast, fully featured image viewer that aims to help you browse, organise, manipulate and print your image files with ease. Supporting over 30 image file formats, including AVI movies and animated GIFs, it lets you build a searchable database of thumbnail images, which are cached to let you preview them quickly.

You can view your images using thumbnails, or choose from full screen mode, auto zoom, auto window size or slide show. The latter option lets you display a collection of images automatically, using forward, reverse, random and single or loop sequencing, along with several user-defined transition effects – this is great for knocking out presentations in a hurry.

You can add text descriptions, notes and keywords to any image file – along with author information – without altering the name or contents of the file. You can then search files by file name, author name, or text that appears in its description – even inside sub folders and archives.

ACDSee can create an HTML index page of thumbnails from all the graphic files in a specified directory, with hypertext links to the larger images. You can customise the size, format and compression ratios of the thumbnails, as well as the look and style of the Web page, along with text headers and footers.

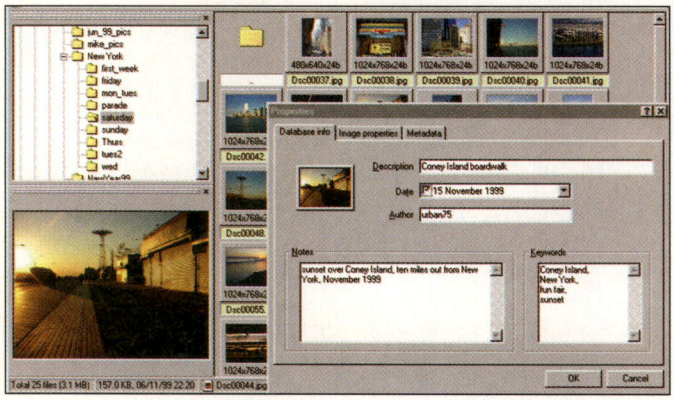
You can also set up favourites folders for quick access to your most popular directories and speed up file copying and moving. ACDSee will convert your images to other formats, either individually or by using the batch command, and lets you customise compression rates.

ACDSee offers several image manipulation tools via its photo enhance interface. This lets you adjust colour and brightness levels, crop and resize your images and apply basic filters. You also get support for importing images from scanners and some digital cameras.

ACDSee should soon pay back its investment and save you hours of trawling through your computer's directories. The fast graphic interface and searchable database, coupled with the useful features, makes this a truly essential product.

Mike Slocombe

★★★★★



ACDSee lets you create searchable text information to make your images easy to find

ACDSee 3

Price *$40 (around £26) to download*
Pros *Fast image preview, searchable image database, HTML thumbnails*
Cons *Limited image manipulation*
Contact *ACD Systems*
Phone *(001250) 382 5828*
www.acdsystems.com

ISDN MODEM

Eicon DIVA USB

An affordable, high quality ISDN modem that you can use at home or on the move

February 2000 internet magazine Best Buy

As the sun sets on the analogue modem market, the market for ISDN devices is healthier than ever – they were thin on the ground two years ago, but you can now get an ISDN card for less than £40.

Eicon Technology has a solid reputation in this field, producing quality ISDN hardware at the quality end of the market. You usually pay a premium for this, but the latest addition to its ISDN peripherals, the DIVA USB, is good value for money. At £99 it's cheaper than many of its less competent rivals.

The new DIVA USB breaks with the Eicon tradition of conservative design. It's about the same size and shape as a mouse, but available in a range of colours. It looks like no other communications device we've ever seen.

The modem is light (about 70g) as well as small, and its USB port lets you swap it easily between your desktop and notebook PC. It offers the standard BRI ISDN 2 specification – up to 128Kbps of bandwidth, CAPI 2.0, Multilink PPP and V.120 support. The DIVA USB can draw its power from your PC, which is convenient, but there's no support for Macs at present.

Installing the DIVA USB is simple – you should be able to connect to your ISP, at 128Kbps, in around five minutes. As soon as you insert the rather short USB lead in to a spare USB port on your PC, the software installation commences. This is simple enough, but it could be made even easier – you have to go deep into a variety of sub folders on the CD-ROM.

A wizard does a lot of the legwork for you, but it asks some probing technical questions. The manual covers the installation and troubleshooting and the rest is located online and on the CD-ROM.

Complete installation of the RVS-COM Lite comms suite requires further attention. Once installed, you can insert and remove the DIVA USB on the fly – a trio of status LEDs on the device tell you if all is well.

The DIVA USB isn't a one-trick pony, and thanks to its German-sourced RVS-COM Lite software, it can do a variety comms tasks, such as faxing, file transfer and voicemail. So, armed with a DIVA USB and RVS-COM, your office could make do with just an ISDN 2e line. Also included on the CD-ROM is a selection of Internet utilities and diagnostic shareware – some are useful, some are just fillers.

Getting an ISDN link to the Internet doesn't get much easier than the DIVA USB. It's affordable and its petite design means you can use it at home or on the move.

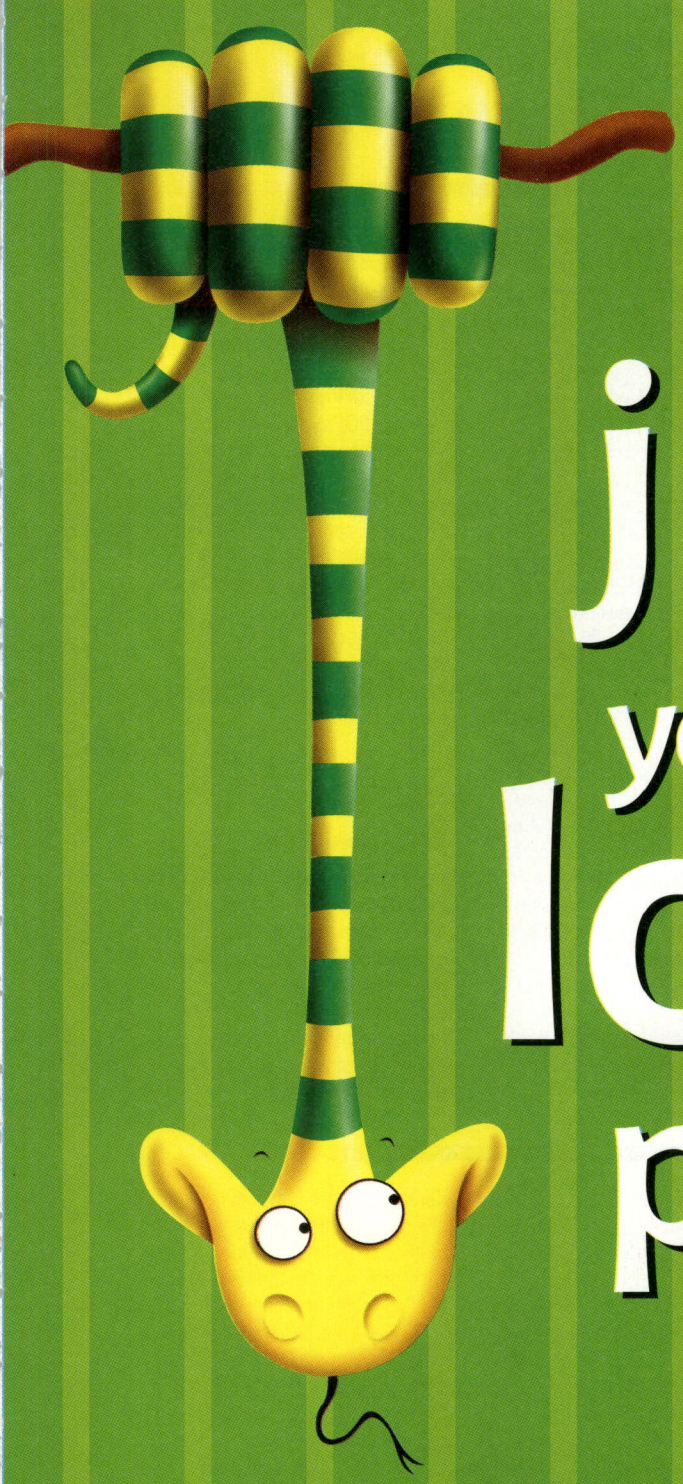
Roger Gann

★★★★★

The DIVA USB is a flexible, easy to use ISDN modem for your home or business

DIVA USB

Price *£99*
Pros *Excellent ease of use, low price, portability*
Cons *Short USB cable*
Contact *Eicon Technology*
Phone *(020) 8967 8000*
www.eicon.com



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FIREWALL HARDWARE

WebRamp 700s

Protect your private home or business network using this fully featured firewall

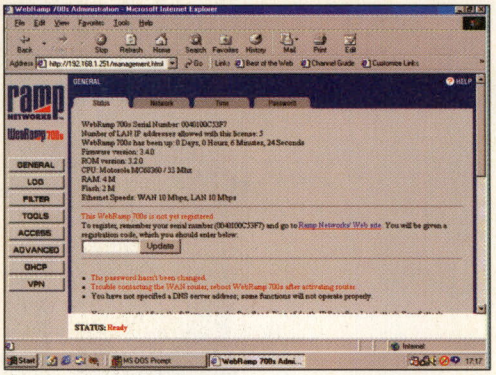
As the prospect of fixed high-speed links to the Net draws tantalisingly closer, security becomes even more important. There are several technologies you can use to defend yourself against external attack, but a firewall is the most popular.

The WebRamp 700s firewall uses packet filtering to protect your private home or business network. It examines incoming and outgoing IP packet headers and checks its characteristics against a rules list that you can create yourself.

Headers contain details about a packet's origin, destination, protocol type, source and destination port number. This lets you build rules about which packets can enter or exit your network.

The WebRamp 700s is a modem-sized product with a handful of status lights at the front and two 10Base-T ports at the rear. You connect one port to your Internet router and the other to your LAN hub.

Once you're connected to the network, you use a Java-enabled browser to configure the firewall and management functions.



ACDSee protects your private network from external attack

The WebRamp 700s has two extra cost optional extras – support for VPN (from £279) and CyberNot content filtering (from £135). When you point your browser at the WebRamp 700s you're greeted with a main status page that summarises your configuration, error messages and the current network status.

The interface has a detailed message log that can be sent to you by email on a regular basis, as well as access to WebRamp's other configuration features. To say this program is highly configurable is an understatement – you can even choose to be emailed when an attack on your network is detected.

The firmware is software upgradeable, so you should keep an eye on the manufacturer's Web site as it posts updates regularly.

The WebRamp 700s operates either in screening mode, where your users have Internet-routable IP addresses, or in Network Address Translation (NAT) mode – where they're given private addresses.

By default, the program blocks all incoming connections to computers on your network, but permits all outgoing connections, giving your users transparent network access without direct exposure to the Internet.

The WebRamp uses a 'stateful' inspection model, and protects your network from known 'denial of service' attacks. You can open holes in the firewall for individual FTP, SMTP, POP3, DNS and HTTP servers on your network. It's also easy to block various types of activity, including RealAudio, Java applets and cookies.

For businesses in need of firewall protection, the security features of the WebRamp 700s, as well as the easy setup and affordable price, make it easy to recommend.

Roger Gann

★★★★☆

WebRamp 700s

Price *£399 (5 users) £645 (25 users)*
Pros *Web-configuration interface, NAT support, built-in DHCP server, optional content filtering, good performance*
Cons *Only 10Mbps at present*
Contact *Ramp Networks*
Phone *(01420) 544 656*
www.rampnet.com

INTERNET DATA TRACKER

NeoTrace

This program lets you map the route that your data takes over the Internet

The Internet's supposed to make geography irrelevant by letting you access information from anywhere. But as anybody who's tried to access a busy US site will tell you, that's not always true.

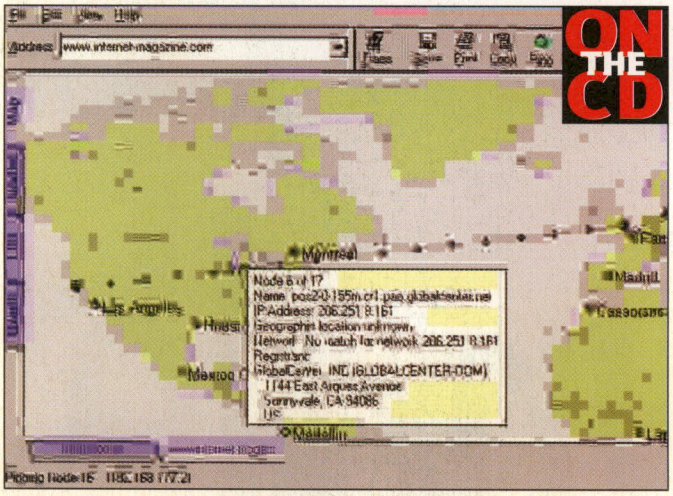
Some programs, such as Traceroute, can tell you where the data you send and receive is going. But you won't find this particularly helpful if this only consists of a meaningless list of router names, such as h2-0.core1.nyc.nac.net. NeoTrace takes this information, maps it into a geographical context and analyses the data.

Input the name of the site you want to check and NeoTrace finds the names of all of the computers and routers between you and the site, as well as the time it takes the data to flow between them.

If you leave it running, it keeps testing the link between you and the server, gradually building up a picture of which step of the journey takes the longest time.

The program draws a map of the appropriate region of the world and attempts to locate the various steps on the way. Unfortunately, this is where NeoTrace falls down. There's no standard way to find the geographical location of a router, and the program relies on information held in its own database and on the registered addresses of Web sites.

This means you often end up with a straight line between you and the Web site, which isn't the real geographical path that the data takes. Fortunately, Neoworx's own database of the location of routers and ISPs is growing, so it should get better with time.



NeoTrace attempts to track the route that data takes from a Web site to your PC

The other downside is the program uses the address of the domain registrant, which isn't always accurate. For instance, you might have registered your domain with an address in the UK, but your servers might be located in the US.

There's more to this program than pretty maps though – it also gives you a non-geographical map of the nodes that your data's passed through. You can also get a graph that shows the time it takes for data to travel between the nodes, including the time for the last test and an average.

You can get a list of the nodes and details of who's responsible for them. These are highly useful tools if you're trying to track down who you should be shouting at for the problems you're encountering on the Net.

Richard Baguley

★★★☆☆

NeoTrace

Price *$30 (Around £19.50). 30-day demo is also available*
Pros *Excellent overview of the path of data*
Cons *Limited geographical information on locations*
Contact *NeoWorx*
Phone *(001937) 886 0185*
www.neoworx.com

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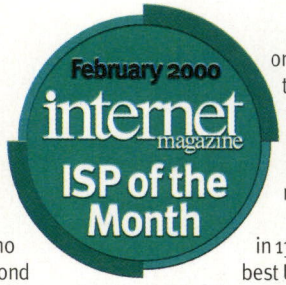
EXCLUSIVE

provider lab

The biggest and best tests // Don't choose an ISP until you've read the results

Find out how the UK's top service providers score in *Internet Magazine*'s exclusive ISP lab tests. Every month we put the best ISPs through a rigorous set of performance tests, so check out how yours has scored. And for the most consistent ISP over the past six months, turn to page 143

The winner



Icom-Web suddenly leapt up the charts in January, rising from 69th to 5th place. This month it's gone all the way to the top, proving the leap was no fluke. It's only the second time we've had a free ISP take the top spot.

And to make it an even more extraordinary month, Cable & Wireless Lite – the first free ISP to take the honours (in November 1999) – has reached number one in our six-monthly tests (see page 143).

Adding reinforcement to the performance surge of the free ISPs are new entrants Kirion and ic24. Kirion is the ISP arm of major hosting company Corpex and has blasted into the rankings at 16th place. Ic24 belongs to the Mirror newspaper group and has come in at a respectable 26th place.

At the top of the table, it's nice to see the top six ISPs achieving 100 per cent availability figures. This means that every time we connected with these providers, we got through first time. Gemsoft, in second place, is only marginally behind the winner and its access speed for US sites was faster than any other ISP in this month's tests.

Direct Net @ccess, in 13th place, has the best UK Web speed, but it's let down by a poor availability figure.

The top mover this month is ConX, which jumps an incredible 73 places from 92nd position– close to the bottom of the table – to 19th spot. Plugin has also done well this month, rising 69 places from 76th to 7th position. Force 9 had a bad month in January, losing 62 places, but it's bounced almost all the way back with a 52-place rise from 77th to 25th position.

It's been a bad month for Netkonect, dropping 83 places from 6th to 89th position, mainly due to poor availability (83.45 per cent). The same problem has hit last month's winner, Uninet Internet Services, which had 100 per cent availability in January. But this figure's dropped to 92.98 this month, hence its fall to 70th place.

Down at the bottom of the table is Pipemedia OnLine, with WSS Internet Access above it in 113th place. Screaming.net has climbed slightly further off the bottom to 107th, but the big surprise is the appearance of Demon just below it in 108th place.

How we test

Our testing machines hold a list of ISPs to test. The system selects four Web sites and tests the download speed for each ISP on the list. When it reaches the bottom of the list, it picks four more sites and starts at the top again.

There are 20 sites on our test list: six from the UK, 11 from the US and three from continental Europe. These numbers are similar to the weightings we give different regions when we calculate the final results.

We look for pages that are unlikely to change over the test period. Pages with CGI or adverts are unsuitable because they're too likely to change. Government and academic sites are often used because their pages are more stable. If a site changes in the middle of a test sequence, we ignore the data and don't include it in the results.

Choosing test sites in the UK is a special problem because most sites are hosted by ISPs and their close associates, and it wouldn't be fair to allow an ISP to be tested on its own sites. For this reason we've to choose UK sites very carefully, and used Traceroute to check who hosts them. We have also chosen sites from different areas of the country, most of which are academic sites.

In the US the situation is easier, since there are more hosts and many of them are not closely associated with UK ISPs. We choose sites hosted on the Eastern seaboard, the West Coast, and in the country's heartland. For our continental sites we use one in France, one in Germany, and one in Scandinavia.

We usually change at least one site each month because it becomes unsuitable or unreliable. This means you have to be careful when you're comparing the download speeds for different months, since the sites tested might not be the same.

For more information on ISPs, visit our newly revamped Web site at www.internet-magazine.com /resource/isp

Uppers&downers

CONX
A leap of 73 places from 92nd position to 19th.

PLUGIN
Rises 69 places from 76th to 7th position.

BAYNET
A new dial-up number has gained the company 60 places this month – it's risen from 112th to 52nd spot.

NETKONECT
A drop of 83 places plunges Netkonect from 6th to 89th position.

FREE-ONLINE
There's a similar fall for Free-Online, which loses 80 places from 31st to 111th.

The only ISP tests that count

The *Internet Magazine* ISP tests are based on proven scientific testing principles. We make sure we connect to each ISP many times – which means we make thousands of calls.

The results produced by this extensive testing are then processed, resulting in the test analysis and ranking figures you see in these pages. At every stage, the results are checked to make sure they're accurate.

Please remember that these tests are only designed to examine the availability and speed of an ISP – we don't test their prices or technical support. For the lowdown on the complete set of services provided by the top 30 ISPs, you can get hold of our gigantic ISP of the Year feature from our Faxback service on page 149.

If you're not a
LUCENT VIP ISP Member
you **SHOULD** *be!*

Key: Free | Subscription | Business

This month's best-performing ISPs, as tested in *Internet Magazine*'s labs

This Month	Last Month	ISP Name	Telephone	Availability (%)	Overall average Web speed (seconds)	Average UK Web sites (seconds)	Average US Web sites (seconds)	Average European sites (seconds)
1	5	Icom-Web	(0800) 731 8419	100.00	11.28	10.25	11.05	15.72
2	15	Gemsoft	(0114) 275 7070	100.00	11.29	10.57	10.81	16.32
3	21	Viper	(07050) 345071	100.00	11.40	10.29	11.27	15.53
4	64	CIX	(0181) 255 5151	100.00	11.41	9.68	11.87	13.92
5	23	ENTANET	(0500) 368 263	100.00	11.43	10.15	11.33	15.87
6	37	Swift Internet	(0845) 6060210	100.00	11.54	10.44	11.33	16.06
7	76	Plugin	(0800) 783 9250	100.00	11.68	10.76	11.46	15.69
8	18	UUNet (Pipex Dial)	(0500) 567 000	100.00	11.71	9.62	11.91	16.82
9	14	CompuServe	(0990) 000 200	99.09	11.62	9.64	11.94	15.68
10	68	Interactive Web	(01926) 450 099	99.11	11.64	10.22	11.71	15.50
11	16	U-Net	(01925) 484 444	100.00	11.86	9.36	12.38	16.24
12	24	Cable & Wireless Lite	(0800) 092 3001	97.39	11.58	9.82	11.50	17.33
13	27	Direct Net @ccess	(01232) 201 555	91.73	10.91	9.21	11.15	14.58
14	3	Ace Internet	(0705) 066 7423	97.36	11.71	10.33	11.75	15.63
15	17	Global Internet	(0870) 909 8041	100.00	12.11	9.62	12.96	14.46
16	–	Kirion	(0171) 242 4555	97.36	11.85	9.75	12.06	16.82
17	25	Cable & Wireless Internet	(0800) 092 3013	98.24	12.03	10.00	11.37	22.10
18	26	Cheapnet	(0990) 168 160	99.11	12.15	10.55	12.24	16.45
19	92	conX	(08707) 410 510	98.23	12.07	10.63	12.09	16.32
20	30	Direct Connection	(0800) 072 0000	99.11	12.20	11.06	12.13	16.07
21	7	Pinnacle Internet	(01903) 524 999	98.23	12.16	10.17	12.14	18.24
22	13	Internet for Business	(01224) 333 370	99.11	12.29	10.99	12.28	16.24
23	22	Connecting Business	(0870) 870 1100	96.52	11.99	10.51	11.79	17.65
24	8	Freedom To Surf	(0181) 881 2111	98.23	12.22	9.72	12.12	20.32
25	77	Force 9	(0800) 073 7800	100.00	12.45	10.01	13.07	16.01
26	–	ic24	(0870) 90 90 262	96.52	12.04	10.76	11.94	16.51
27	73	Free-Online	(0870) 706 0504	100.00	12.48	10.38	12.88	16.35
28	11	CableNet	(0800) 195 8888	100.00	12.49	10.20	13.01	16.19
29	39	Bun	(0845) 306 3636	99.10	12.37	10.44	12.65	16.53
30	19	Wyenet	(01989) 762 476	100.00	12.53	10.48	12.68	17.76
31	42	Cygnet Internet Services	(0181) 880 4650	99.10	12.46	11.09	12.39	16.97
32	34	Interalpha	(01703) 363 200	100.00	12.58	10.85	12.62	17.55
33	83	Avante Internet	(01283) 545 000	100.00	12.58	10.92	12.69	16.95
34	40	AIC-Entanet	(01279) 306 677	98.24	12.36	10.69	12.58	16.05
35	20	VAS-NET	(01732) 866 529	99.10	12.58	12.05	12.34	15.57
36	103	UKPeople	(0800) 542 5200	99.10	12.58	10.89	12.85	16.03
37	35	REDNET	(01494) 513 333	97.36	12.38	9.90	13.19	14.96
38	28	DIALNet Connect	(0800) 881 881	100.00	12.74	11.80	12.45	17.25
39	81	Madasafish	(09010) 222324	100.00	12.76	11.78	12.92	14.69
40	66	Zen Internet	(01706) 713 714	96.52	12.32	10.22	12.91	15.09
41	12	Strongnet	(01703) 866 006	100.00	12.79	10.82	13.11	16.73
42	51	I-Way Soho	(0171) 734 5734	98.23	12.56	13.02	11.95	14.87
43	102	SAQ Internet	(0870) 737 7700	99.10	12.70	10.39	12.81	18.97
44	10	Newnet	(07000) 639 638	95.68	12.28	11.38	11.90	17.25
45	57	FDD	(01865) 321003	100.00	12.85	11.14	12.63	19.28
46	56	Sonnet Internet	(0171) 891 2000	96.52	12.47	10.24	13.10	15.37
47	29	Portland communications	(0181) 942 1115	97.36	12.59	10.75	12.88	16.32
48	52	Legend Internet	(01274) 743 500	100.00	12.94	10.80	13.28	17.38
49	85	BT Internet	(0800) 800 001	99.10	12.83	10.66	13.31	16.51
50	78	Telinco Internet Services	(0800) 542 0800	99.11	12.85	11.08	13.06	16.87
51	9	London Web Communications	(0800) 026 8306	93.33	12.13	10.50	12.20	16.60
52	112	Baynet	(01222) 256 401	94.87	12.34	9.82	12.88	16.66

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This month's best-performing ISPs, as tested in *Internet Magazine*'s labs

Free | Subscription | Business

This Month	Last Month	ISP Name	Telephone	Availability (%)	Overall average Web speed (seconds)	Average UK Web sites (seconds)	Average US Web sites (seconds)	Average European sites (seconds)
53	84	btclick.com	(0800) 731 7887	98.24	12.80	11.75	12.87	15.53
54	50	NetDirect Internet	(0800) 731 3311	100.00	13.08	10.12	13.51	19.40
55	54	SoftProg NET	(0181) 788 0656	95.72	12.54	10.68	12.78	16.70
56	47	Frontier Internet Services	(0171) 536 9090	95.68	12.56	10.35	12.94	16.96
57	72	TIA NET	(0800) 092 6070	97.36	12.81	10.33	13.73	14.78
58	2	Datanet	(01252) 810 081	89.60	11.83	10.58	11.59	16.98
59	61	The Internet Business	(01232) 424 190	100.00	13.24	11.49	13.28	18.19
60	95	Easynet	(0171) 681 4444	95.68	12.67	11.34	12.62	16.95
61	63	Mistral Internet	(0800) 328 7253	95.72	12.75	9.73	13.82	15.39
62	100	IPNet		100.00	13.34	13.62	12.68	16.47
63	87	Moonlight	(01276) 856 868	100.00	13.35	11.04	13.66	18.38
64	4	Nildram	(0800) 496 2903	96.52	12.91	12.84	12.34	16.62
65	107	LineOne	(0906) 302 0100	95.68	12.81	9.94	13.71	16.02
66	93	Newbury Internet	(01635) 569 123	98.24	13.21	10.64	13.46	19.40
67	71	Which?-Online	(0645) 830 240	95.72	12.88	11.66	12.96	16.09
68	80	Virgin Net	(0500) 558 800	99.11	13.35	11.27	13.73	17.32
69	74	Prestel Online	(0990) 223 300	98.23	13.24	10.67	13.75	17.88
70	1	Uninet Internet Services	(0800) 783 7499	92.98	12.53	10.54	12.42	19.13
71	75	Intonet	(0181) 941 9195	97.36	13.14	10.12	13.76	18.46
72	101	Poptel	(0171) 923 9465	95.68	12.92	10.72	13.00	19.05
73	98	Technocom	(01753) 714 200	96.52	13.08	10.28	13.72	17.63
74	45	inweb	(0845) 606 2014	100.00	13.57	11.27	13.95	18.16
75	53	WorldWide Web Services	(01784) 898 800	91.80	12.48	10.07	12.87	17.33
76	36	Paradise Internet	(01256) 414 863	99.11	13.49	10.48	14.22	18.16
77	91	Ideal Internet services	(01942) 522 333	99.10	13.56	10.60	14.26	18.23
78	48	Power Internet	(01908) 605 188	94.11	12.90	10.50	13.61	15.87
79	104	FreeUK	(0900) 900 0900	93.27	12.88	11.21	13.09	16.63
80	32	Cerbernet	(0171) 360 8000	94.91	13.13	11.36	13.20	17.98
81	90	Breathe	(0800) 298 3030	99.10	13.78	13.88	13.17	17.14
82	43	Abel Gratis	(0131) 445 5555	94.06	13.12	10.70	13.83	16.14
83	58	DNA Internet Services	(01604) 670 717	98.24	13.73	11.11	14.07	19.60
84	41	UK2Net	(0171) 538 0253	93.33	13.05	11.35	13.11	17.80
85	82	Firstnet	(0113) 294 4224	100.00	14.01	12.74	13.49	20.93
86	69	NetDirect Online	(0800) 731 3311	100.00	14.02	11.32	14.74	17.79
87	59	HiWay	(01635) 573 300	93.27	13.14	10.36	13.95	16.60
88	55	Internet UK	(0845) 070 0006	90.32	12.90	11.79	12.83	16.69
89	6	Netkonect	(0171) 345 7777	83.45	11.98	10.48	12.26	14.80
90	44	Primex	(01908) 643 597	99.10	14.37	14.10	14.49	14.50
91	94	ClaraNet	(0800) 358 2828	89.60	13.00	10.93	13.29	17.46
92	65	CommUnity Internet	(01865) 856 000	100.00	14.55	10.86	15.98	17.04
93	60	Netcom Internet	(0800) 980 9107	96.55	14.22	10.89	15.11	18.82
94	67	Eclipse Networking	01392 202 345	95.72	14.11	11.75	14.49	18.89
95	62	Wave Rider Internet	(0121) 603 3888	98.24	14.49	10.56	15.01	23.16
96	38	ICM Netserv	(0800) 614 581	95.68	14.16	11.39	15.17	16.44
97	106	Onyx	(0345) 715 715	100.00	14.84	13.05	14.51	22.18
98	33	Aviators Network	(0700) 284 2867	89.60	13.33	11.04	13.72	17.85
99	79	Freebeeb	(09066) 500 600	94.06	14.02	11.32	14.74	17.79
100	99	UK Online	(0845) 333 4567	91.80	13.70	11.61	13.36	22.04
101	88	Gifford Internet Services	(0117) 939 7722	94.06	14.09	13.89	13.54	18.00
102	46	Netscape Online	(0800) 923 0009	81.61	12.33	10.00	13.04	15.11
103	111	Enterprise	(01624) 677 666	99.10	15.40	14.04	15.68	17.80
104	89	Cable Internet	(0500) 500 100	90.98	14.94	11.37	16.00	19.27
105	49	Zoo Internet	(0181) 961 7000	90.32	14.86	13.41	14.53	21.15
106	97	CYBERphile Internet	(01543) 454 840	98.23	16.16	12.96	17.49	17.80
107	109	Screaming.net (BT line)	(0800) 376 5262	78.72	12.99	11.83	13.16	15.44
108	86	Demon	(0181) 371 1234	99.10	16.65	13.27	18.31	16.89
109	108	Discovery	(01203) 364 400	91.73	15.57	13.10	16.26	18.81
110	70	Freeserve	(0990) 500 049	81.02	13.84	10.17	13.79	25.19
111	31	Pavilion Internet	(01273) 607 072	97.36	17.06	15.32	17.53	19.46
112	96	Vossnet	(01753) 737 800	88.80	16.30	14.12	17.07	18.26
113	110	WSS Internet Access	(01793) 420 764	99.11	18.25	14.99	18.88	24.24
114	105	Pipemedia OnLine	(01455) 828 218	100.00	19.60	14.45	21.14	25.80

How the performance tests work

The *Internet Magazine* provider labs tests are designed to give you all the information you need on the speed and availability of ISPs. Every month, our system accesses each of the ISPs on the list many times. Our system repeatedly checks:

- The availability of the ISP. How easy is it to make the connection? How often are the ISP's modems engaged?
- The speed of the connection. How long do a number of popular Web pages take to download?

To rank the ISPs, we calculate the geometric mean of the availability and average Web performance.

- This month's tests ran over the period 1-12 December 1999

Ask Yourself this Question?

How fREE is your FREE ISP?!

PurpleNet™

Monthly Cost for Weekend Internet Line Usage

	30 hrs	50 hrs
PurpleNet	£9.99	£9.99
FREE ISP	£18*	£30*

* standard local call rate

includes
25MB OF WEBSPACE
UNLIMITED EMAIL ADDRESSES
LOCAL RATE TELEPHONE SUPPORT

If you think your FREE ISP is completely FREE
THINK AGAIN!
FREE ISP's may not charge you a subscription but you still have to pay for the time you spend online. With PurpleNet's NEW Internet Call Plans you can casually browse the Net on WEEKENDS or EVENINGS without paying a penny in call charges..... All this for just a flat rate monthly subscription of £9.99 + Vat.

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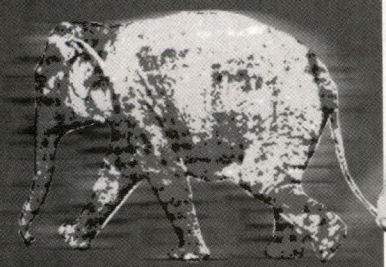

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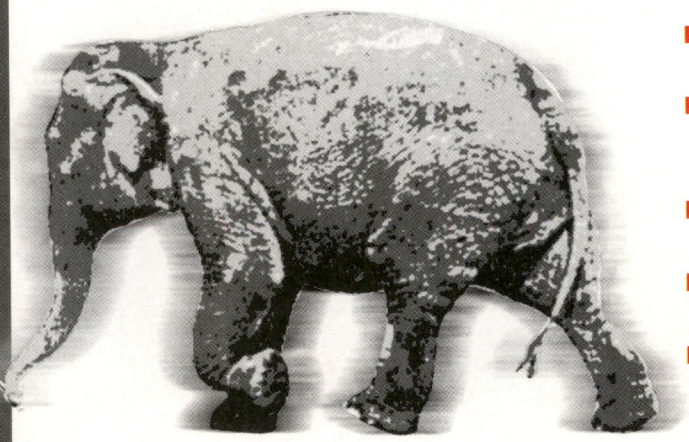

FREE Microsoft Frontpage Extensions
FREE Web Email Account
FREE POP3 Email Account - Unlimited Alias
FREE Mail Forwarding
FREE Account Setup
FREE Bandwidth - 155Mbs Connection
NEW Real Audio Server

Don't forget,
apply now and take advantage of this BIG offer

How the ISPs performed over the past six months

Find out how your service provider has done in our unique chart...

Free Subscription Business

	Provider	Phone	URL
1	Cable & Wireless Lite	(0800) 092 3001	www.cwcom.net
2	Cable & Wireless Internet	(0800) 092 3013	www.cwcom.net
3	CompuServe	(0990) 000 200	www.compuserve.co.uk
4	Uninet Internet Services	(0800) 783 7499	www.uninet.co.uk
5	Gemsoft	(0114) 275 7070	www.gemsoft.net
6	VAS-NET	(01732) 866 529	www.vas-net.net
7	Datanet	(01252) 810 081	www.data.net.uk
8	UUNet (Pipex Dial)	(0500) 567 000	www.uk.uu.net
9	ENTANET	(0500) 368 263	www.enta.net
10	Ace Internet	(0705) 066 7423	www.ace-internet.co.uk
11	Global Internet	(0870) 909 8041	www.global.net.uk
12	DIALNet Connect	(0800) 881 881	www.dialnet.com
13	U-Net	(01925) 484 444	www.u-net.net
14	Internet for Business	(01224) 333 370	www.ifb.net
15	Newnet	(07000) 639 638	www.newnet.co.uk/home
16	Pinnacle Internet	(01903) 524 999	www.pncl.co.uk
17	Internet UK	(0845) 070 0006	www.internet-uk.net
18	Sonnet Internet	(0171) 891 2000	www.sonnet.co.uk
19	Direct Net @ccess	(01232) 201 555	www.d-n-a.net
20	Mistral Internet	(0800) 328 7253	www.mistral-uk.net
21	Viper	(07050) 345071	www.viper.co.uk
22	Direct Connection	(0800) 072 0000	www.dircon.net
23	Netkonect	(0171) 345 7777	www.netkonect.co.uk
24	Strongnet	(01703) 866 006	www.strongnet.co.uk
25	Freedom To Surf	(0181) 881 2111	www.freedom2surf.net
26	Cheapnet	(0990) 168 160	www.cheapnet.co.uk
27	CableNet	(0800) 195 8888	www.cablenet.net
28	inweb	(0845) 606 2014	www.inweb.net.uk
29	Nildram	(0800) 496 2903	www.nildram.net
30	NetDirect Internet	(0800) 731 3311	www.netdirect.net.uk
31	Power Internet	(01908) 605 188	www.powernet.co.uk
32	REDNET	(01494) 513 333	www.red.net
33	Which?-Online	(0645) 830 240	www.which.net
34	London Web Communications	(0800) 026 8306	www.londonweb.net
35	The Internet Business	(01232) 424 190	www.tibus.net
36	SoftProg NET	(0181) 788 0656	www.softprog.net
37	HiWay	(01635) 573 300	www.hiway.co.uk
38	AIC-Entanet	(01279) 306 677	www.aic.co.uk
39	Interactive Web	(01926) 450 099	www.wwwuk.net
40	Interalpha	(01703) 363 200	www.interalpha.net
41	Avante Internet	(01283) 545 000	www.avante-uk.net
42	Virgin Net	(0500) 558 800	www.virgin.net
43	Portland communications	(0181) 942 1115	www.portland.co.uk
44	Swift Internet	(0845) 6060210	www.swiftinter.net
45	Cerbernet	(0171) 360 8000	www.cerbernet.net
46	Primex	(01908) 643 597	www.primex.co.uk
47	Cygnet Internet Services	(0181) 880 4650	www.cygnet.co.uk
48	Legend Internet	(01274) 743 500	www.legend.co.uk
49	Intonet	(0181) 941 9195	www.intonet.co.uk
50	Pavilion Internet	(01273) 607 072	www.pavilion.co.uk
51	ICM Netserv	(0800) 614 581	www.netserv.net
52	CommUnity Internet	(01865) 856 000	www.community.net.uk
53	Free-Online	(0870) 706 0504	www.free-online.net
54	UK Online	(0845) 333 4567	www.ukonline.net
55	BT Internet	(0800) 800 001	www.btinternet.com
56	Prestel Online	(0990) 223 300	www.prestel.co.uk
57	Easynet	(0171) 681 4444	www.easynet.co.uk
58	Freeserve	(0990) 500 049	www.freeserve.net
59	UK2Net	(0171) 538 0253	www.uk2net.com
60	WorldWide Web Services	(01784) 898 800	www.webs.co.uk
61	Frontier Internet Services	(0171) 536 9090	www.ftech.co.uk
62	Force 9	(0800) 073 7800	www.force9.net
63	Paradise Internet	(01256) 414 863	www.pins.co.uk
64	TIA NET	(0800) 092 6070	www.tianet.com
65	ClaraNet	(0800) 358 2828	www.clara.net
66	Telinco Internet Services	(0800) 542 0800	www.telinco.co.uk
67	LineOne	(0906) 302 0100	www.lineone.net
68	Demon	(0181) 371 1234	www.demon.net
69	SAQ Internet	(0870) 737 7700	www.saqnet.co.uk
70	I-Way Soho	(0171) 734 5734	www.i-way.co.uk
71	Gifford Internet Services	(0117) 939 7722	www.gifford.co.uk
72	DNA Internet Services	(01604) 670 717	www.dna-is.com
73	Aviators Network	(0700) 284 2867	www.aviators.net
74	Moonlight	(01276) 856 868	www.moon-light.co.uk
75	Onyx	(0345) 715 715	www.onyxnet.co.uk
76	Eclipse Networking	01392 202 345	www.eclipse.co.uk
77	Ideal Internet services	(01942) 522 333	www.idealnet.co.uk
78	Netcom Internet	(0800) 980 9107	www.netcom.net.uk
79	btclick.com	(0800) 731 7887	www.btclick.com
80	Newbury Internet	(01635) 569 123	www.newbury.net
81	Abel Gratis	(0906) 680 4444	www.abelgratis.co.uk
82	FreeUK	(0900) 900 0900	www.freeuk.net
83	Cable Internet	(0500) 500 100	www.cableinet.co.uk
84	Technocom	(01753) 714 200	www.technocom.net
85	CYBERphile Internet	(01543) 454 840	www.cyberphile.co.uk
86	Vossnet	(01753) 737 800	www.vossnet.co.uk
87	Pipemedia OnLine	(01455) 828 218	www.pipemedia.co.uk
88	Wave Rider Internet	(0121) 603 3888	www.waverider.co.uk
89	Zoo Internet	(0181) 961 7000	www.zoo.co.uk
90	Baynet	(01222) 256 401	www.baynet.co.uk
91	Enterprise	(01624) 677 666	www.enterprise.net
92	Discovery	(01203) 364 400	www.discover.co.uk
93	WSS Internet Access	(01793) 420 764	www.WSkiSoft.co.uk
94	Screaming.net (BT line)	(0800) 376 5262	www.screaming.net

Top performers in the past six months

As well as our normal tests, every month we produce a table showing how the ISPs have performed over the last six months. This is created by averaging the monthly results for availability and Web access speed. The table only includes ISPs that have figured in our monthly tables in every one of the past six months. Some providers aren't included because we only began testing them recently. Others haven't made it because of problems testing them in at least one of these months. Exclusion from this table is no reflection on the quality of the ISP's service.

The results

This month, 94 providers have qualified for our six-month tests – the largest number ever. Top of the rankings is Cable & Wireless Lite. This service was the first free ISP to hit the top spot in our monthly tables in November, and its consistency has at last been rewarded. It's a wonderful month for Cable & Wireless, which also comes second with its regular subscriber service.

Three ISPs have an unblemished record for availability over the last six months – Global Internet, Strongnet and Pipemedia OnLine. VAS-NET, in sixth place, is the highest of the six new entries. February's star performer is Direct Net @ccess, which climbs 15 places to 19th spot.

Pavilion Internet is travelling in the opposite direction, dropping 26 places to 50th. Demon has lost 21 places to 68th position. Onyx continues its decline in the rankings, falling 17 places to 75th. Screaming.net slips into the table for the first time, but goes right in at the bottom.

Calculations

Each month, as well as adding the new data in from the current monthly tests, we drop the data for the monthly results seven months ago. This removal often has as much influence on the six month rankings as the addition of the new data - if not more.

To make sure that each month is of roughly equal value, the download speed figures for past months are adjusted using a mathematical formula so they conform to the numerical spreads we get from our current tests.

This adjustment allows us to produce a worthwhile average across the entire six month period. If you're looking for consistency from your service provider, these are the results you should watch.

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hosting lab tests

Find the best home for your site

Each month *Internet Magazine* tests the performance of the best Web hosting companies. With our results, you can make sure your site's getting the best possible care

This month's best performing hosting companies

	Host Name	Host URL	UK Web throughput (kbps)	Availability
1	Inweb Networks	www.inweb.net.uk	1210.96	99.27
2	Nildram	www.nildram.net	1176.67	99.54
3	NewNet	www.newnet.co.uk	939.57	99.98
4	VBCnet	www.vbc.net	857.29	99.78
5	Wessex Net	www.wessex.net	723.11	92.23
6	Virtual Internet	www.vi.net	713.89	99.59
7	Net Direct	www.netdirect.net.uk	673.39	99.88
8	easynet	www.easynet.co.uk	646.19	92.89
9	Zeronet	www.zeronet.co.uk	641.73	99.91
10	Caberfeidh UK Ltd	www.caberfeidh.co.uk	624.09	99.85
11	Demon Internet	www.demon.net	616.96	98.14
12	Gemsoft	www.gemsoft.net	593.24	99.98
13	Direct Connection	www.dircon.net	583.21	99.85
14	Freedom To Surf	www.freedom2surf.net	566.99	100.00
15	NetBenefit	www.netbenefit.co.uk	545.23	99.98
16	Frontier Internet Services	www.ftech.co.uk	535.01	100.00
17	Mistral Internet	www.new.mistral.co.uk	508.80	99.52
18	Netcom UK	www.netcom.net.uk	446.99	99.95
19	Paradise Internet Network Services	www.pins.co.uk	417.70	99.59
20	ClaraNet Ltd	www.clara.net	404.83	99.98
21	Technocom PLC	www.technocom.net	390.10	99.98
22	WebWorlds	www.webworlds.co.uk	387.69	99.78
23	Internet Network Services	www.insnet.net	366.82	93.95
24	UUNET UK	www.uk.uu.net	325.37	98.43
25	U-NET	www.u-net.net	322.17	99.93
26	GX Networks	www.gxn.net	317.83	99.98
27	Searley Data Services	www.searley.net	315.77	99.47
28	Corpex	www.corpex.com	306.80	99.90
29	K-web Internet	www.k-web.co.uk	302.13	99.32
30	FDD	www.fdd.co.uk	301.76	99.90
31	Netcentric Solutions Ltd	www.netcentric.co.uk	300.75	99.61
32	Egg	www.eggconnect.net	280.95	99.85
33	Hotlinks Internet Services	www.hotlinks.co.uk	274.60	99.90
34	Digiserve	www.digiserve.co.uk	273.06	99.90
35	Cybercity Internet	www.cyber-city.co.uk	262.73	99.95
36	Telinco	www.telinco.net	251.57	99.95
37	.netkonect	www.netkonect.co.uk	247.26	96.81
38	Quik Internet North East England	www.ne.quik.co.uk	228.10	99.90
39	Ace Internet	www.ace-internet.co.uk	225.44	96.78
40	Akitanet	www.akitanet.co.uk	224.47	99.90
41	Worldwide Web Services	www.webs.co.uk	220.42	99.59
42	Netcetera	www.inetc.net	215.86	100.00
43	STRONGNET	www.strongnet.net	213.46	99.95
44	Magic Moments	www.magic-moments.com	212.21	100.00
45	PSINet UK Ltd	www.uk.psi.net	205.63	98.26
46	Alkazar Internet	www.alkazar.net	203.43	99.73
47	Newton Solutions Ltd	www.newtonsols.net	197.85	100.00
48	UK Business Internet	www.ukbusinessinternet.co.uk	194.13	98.69
49	Cheapnet Ltd	www.cheapnet.co.uk	185.56	94.05
50	Plus Net	www.plus.net.uk	184.29	97.22
51	Abel Internet	www.abel.net.uk	183.47	98.62
52	Trinite	www.trinite.co.uk	179.57	99.93
53	BT WebWorld	www.btwebworld.co.uk	171.22	99.93
54	CondorIS.Net	www.condoris.net	170.45	88.96
55	Premier internet 2000	www.pi2000.net	168.68	99.78
56	Voyager Internet Uk	www.voyager.net.uk	164.69	98.60
57	Research Machines	www.rmplc.co.uk	162.77	99.90
58	Datanet International	www.data.net.uk	157.21	99.78
59	NDCG Online	www.ndcg.co.uk	156.66	91.14
60	Metronet	www.metronet.co.uk	156.32	99.93
61	LEOnet Ltd	www.leonet.co.uk	153.68	99.01
62	Exploit Information Technology Ltd	www.exploit.co.uk	151.34	99.64
63	IDnet	www.idnet.net.uk	150.71	92.86
64	Community internet plc	www.community.co.uk	149.51	99.85
65	Scotland Online	www.scotland.net	148.58	97.39
66	Server World	www.serverworld.net	148.07	97.87
67	Church Net UK	www.churchnet.org.uk	146.92	99.76
68	Alcom Internetix	www.alcom.co.uk	146.87	99.83
69	Cocoon Internet Services	www.cocoon.co.uk	146.54	98.86
70	Pavilion Internet	www.pavilion.co.uk	144.95	98.86
71	InstaCities	www.instacities.com	143.78	99.33
72	Bucks Net	www.bucks.net	143.36	99.95
73	iNetUK	www.inetuk.net	143.28	99.54
74	UKIP	www.ukip.co.uk	142.73	91.65
75	Prestel On-line	www.prestel.co.uk	142.19	97.39
76	Teleregion	www.teleregion.co.uk	141.75	99.95
77	York UK Hosting	www.york-uk.com	141.06	98.45
78	EntWeb	www.entweb.co.uk	139.70	98.93
79	Charis Internet Services	www.charis.net	137.94	99.81
80	Cherryblue Internet Ltd	www.cherryblue.com	136.54	98.35
81	Wave Rider Internet	www.waverider.net.uk	135.52	99.85
82	Vital Online Ltd	www.vital.co.uk	134.36	98.50
83	London Web	www.londonweb.co.uk	133.83	99.93
84	DSC	www.dsc.net	131.13	99.98
85	Shared Knowledge	www.sharedknowledge.net	122.88	99.95
86	PLiG	www2.plig.net	119.07	99.98
87	Sonnet Internet Ltd	www.sonnet.co.uk	115.75	98.84
88	Kingston Internet	www.kingston-internet.net	110.67	99.54
89	Just Space	www.justspace.com	108.24	99.64
90	Myratech	www.myratech.co.uk	104.18	97.12
91	edNET	www.ednet.co.uk	102.64	99.85
92	Atlas Internet	www.atlas.net.uk	102.11	99.47
93	IFB	www.ifb.net	101.91	99.85
94	Cerbernet Ltd	www.cerbernet.net	101.55	99.61
95	V-Host Internet Solutions Ltd	www.vhost.uk.net	100.21	99.06
96	OKChicken	www.okchicken.com	99.47	99.93

This month's best performing hosting companies

	Host Name	Host URL	UK Web throughput (Kbps)	Availability
97	Shellnet	www.shellnet.co.uk	97.60	99.95
98	Zetnet Internet Service	www.zetnet.co.uk	95.15	98.11
99	The Web Factory	www.webfactory.co.uk	93.78	99.98
100	TWF Corporate Solution	www.twf.net	88.67	99.95
101	I-Way Limited	www.i-way.co.uk	88.01	97.07
102	Tecc Ltd	www.tecc.co.uk	87.70	99.93
103	Soft Options UK	www.softopt.co.uk	87.21	99.71
104	Triangle Multimedia Limited	www.triangle-multimedia.co.uk	86.53	93.39
105	Cygnet Internet Solutions	www.cygnet.co.uk	85.34	100.00
106	Club24 Internet	www.club24.co.uk	84.59	100.00
107	REDNET	www.red.net	81.53	100.00
108	East Midlands Network (EMNET)	www.emnet.co.uk	79.21	99.95
109	UK Fast Hosting	www.ukfast.co.uk	78.85	99.90
110	Fasthosts Internet Ltd	www.fasthosts.co.uk	77.87	99.81
111	Netalia Internet	www.netalia.com	76.16	99.54
112	Internet Central	www.netcentral.co.uk	75.50	99.71
113	ENTANET	www.enta.net	73.95	93.54
114	Netlink Internet Services	www.netlink.co.uk	68.58	100.00
115	Tripod UK	www.tripod.co.uk	67.22	99.83
116	TooTech	www.tootech.co.uk	66.32	86.60
117	Cloud Nine	www.cloud-nine.com	64.66	99.44
118	LDS Technology Ltd	www.lds.co.uk	64.22	92.55
119	architec computer solutions	www.architec.co.uk	63.76	93.40
120	Onyx Internet	www.onyxnet.co.uk	60.46	99.73
121	Valdi Internet	www.valdi.net	59.73	98.69
122	AiNET	www.ai.net	56.49	99.90
123	Thames Global Internet Services	www.tgis.co.uk	55.10	99.90
124	Easyspace Ltd	www.jross.co.uk	51.44	99.71
125	PlugIn.co.uk Limited	www.plugin.co.uk	48.69	99.90
126	gradwell dot com Limited	www.gradwell.com	47.85	98.74
127	Global Gold Network Ltd	www.globalgold.co.uk	47.12	99.95
128	AIC-Entanet	www.aic.co.uk/entanet	46.59	99.95
129	NetMint, LLC	www.netmint.com	40.24	99.61
130	Data Link Internet	www.data-link.net	38.16	92.89
131	Legend Internet	www.legend.co.uk	35.72	99.49
132	Ultraspeed UK Limited	www.ultraspeed.co.uk	35.58	90.90
133	Far Networks	www.far.net	34.92	99.76
134	Thinking Fish Limited	http://thinkingfish.com	30.52	99.56
135	WebAdvantage Inc.	www.wavi.com	30.17	99.60
136	Calligrafix	www.calligrafix.co.uk	30.13	97.07
137	VillageNet	www.villagenet.com	28.34	99.73
138	Design Heaven	www.designheaven.com	27.85	99.49
139	Stayfree Internet	www.stayfree.co.uk	27.67	99.90
140	ME-NET!	www.me-net.net	23.22	99.25
141	D.Net	www.dnet.it	22.02	98.81
142	Cybase Ltd	www.cybase.co.uk	18.11	99.71
143	WinNet	www.win-uk.net	14.50	99.93
144	Webfuture	www.webfuture.co.uk	14.08	97.68
145	Versus.NET	www.versus.net	14.08	99.10
146	UK Internet Ltd	www.uki-demo.co.uk	14.05	99.96
147	Andover Online	www.andover.co.uk	12.31	100.00
148	Stratus Net	www.stratus.net	12.28	99.61
149	Croxsons New Media	www.cnm-uk.net	12.27	100.00
150	Apanet	www.apenet.co.uk	12.01	99.73
151	INGS, Inc.	www.ings.com	12.01	26.75
152	modus	www.modus.co.uk	11.76	99.71
153	Devilnet UK Ltd	www.devilnet.co.uk	10.61	98.35
154	Merula	http://webperf.merula.net	9.74	97.70
155	Timewarp	www.timewarp.co.uk	9.05	99.83
156	Gibnet Limited	www.gibnet.gi	7.08	98.06
157	NUX	www.caines.co.uk	6.57	100.00
158	Orchid Internet	www.orchidinternet.co.uk	6.22	98.77
159	On The Spot	www.eyecare2000.co.uk	1.85	99.95

Hosting performance tests

You've entrusted your beloved Web site to a Web host. How well is it being treated? Does it download quickly and reliably, or struggle down the wire? In conjunction with Zeus Technologies, we've put 159 Web host companies to the test.

This month's winner is Inweb Networks, with a top speed of 1210.96kbps and 99.27 per cent availability. The top 10 is reshuffled by Net Direct, up 30 places from last month. Zeronet enters this privileged group in ninth place from 15th last month. Wessex Net (fifth) and Virtual Internet (sixth) deserve mentions for their consistency.

The biggest climber this month is Freedom To Surf, which jumps 62 places to 14, thanks to a massive increase in throughput of almost 500 per cent. Plus Net rises from the doldrums of 102nd to 50th place.

There weren't any major tumbles this month, but three hosts have slipped 30 places. UKIP drops from 44th to 74th place due to a fall in availability, and York UK Hosting drops 30 places to 77th thanks to its poor throughput figure. Tecc Ltd falls 30 places to 102nd position due to a drastic drop in throughput to 87.7kbps.

There were nine new entrants to the tests this month. Akitanet was the best performer in 40th place, with a throughput of 224kbps and an excellent 99.9 per cent availability.

Measuring potential

Our top quoted throughput figures are over 1,000kbps, yet modems rarely manage more than 5kbps. The idea is, if you can download at 1,000kbps on a high bandwidth connection, it's the equivalent of 200 people simultaneously downloading at 5kbps.

Many of our test page files are from the host companies' own corporate pages. Not all the hosts' clients will get this premium level of performance, but the idea is that if a host can't get its own pages to download perfectly, it's unlikely to offer anything better for its clients.

More about the company behind the Web hosting tests

The *Internet Magazine* Web host tests are carried out by Zeus Technology, which provides Web hosting companies and ISPs with high performance, easy to use, feature rich Web server software. Zeus Technology has crafted the fastest and most scaleable Web server software in the world, providing mission critical reliability to its customers. Designed for large-scale I-commerce solutions, the company's products contain the strongest levels of security available. Zeus Technology and *Internet Magazine* are committed to delivering the best Web host service testing in the UK. For more details, see **www.zeustechnology.com**.

How we do it

The rankings are based on transfer speed – how fast files can be downloaded from the host server to our test machines. There are five test machines in the UK, plus a check machine in the US.

We measure data throughput when downloading a file within a specified size range. We choose images and not HTML files as they're far less likely to have been parsed or dynamically generated. Poor performance is usually the result of limited or overloaded bandwidth, or overloaded hardware/software.

The second figure in the table shows the availability of the host server. Our test system tries to contact the host every 15 minutes, 24 hours a day – nearly 3,000 tests a month. The availability figure tells you how often it gets through.

The tests ran over the period 1-15 December 1999. For more details on how the tests are carried out, plus a look at how the current tests are going, visit **www.webperf.net**.

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We have used several hosting companies over the years but none have approached the high standards set by NSL *Dr P.H. Johnson The Dedicated Partnership*

NSL are technically very competent, have hosted our server for over 3 years, and always provide 1st class professional service - *Gill Campbell,Marketing Director - Cortex*

Fastest servers in Scotland, fastest response to solving problems and technically the best guys I've come across. *David Blockley MD - The Internet Farm*

Outgrown your ISP and didn't realise?

Do you have an e-commerce solution that links your website into your Bank? Is your site as fast to browse as it should be? Do you have streaming video? Are you getting proper reports on your website visitors? Do you have an account manager who understands your business? If the answer to any of these questions is no, you should think about making the move to NSL NET.

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■ Domain Name Registration

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■ Colocated Server

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E-Commerce with NSL NET

NSL NET offers two different e-commerce packages. NSL Shop and NSL Clear which allow you to setup shop on the Internet and process payments automatically. These systems are currently powering many successful Internet businesses.

NSL Shop provides you with a database driven catalogue system, capable of coping with shops selling one or two items to thousands. A set of easy to use webforms allows unskilled staff to change price or product details without needing to know HTML or use an FTP programme.

A shopping basket system is included. This can handle complex delivery options, with different prices according to weight of products, where they are being sent to and by what speed of delivery. There's also a secure server for taking credit card details. Transactions are recorded in a database ready for import into any major spreadsheet or database. Orders can be sent to you in a PGP encrypted email or passed to NSL Clear. NSL Shop is £549 per year and includes a Small Business Package.

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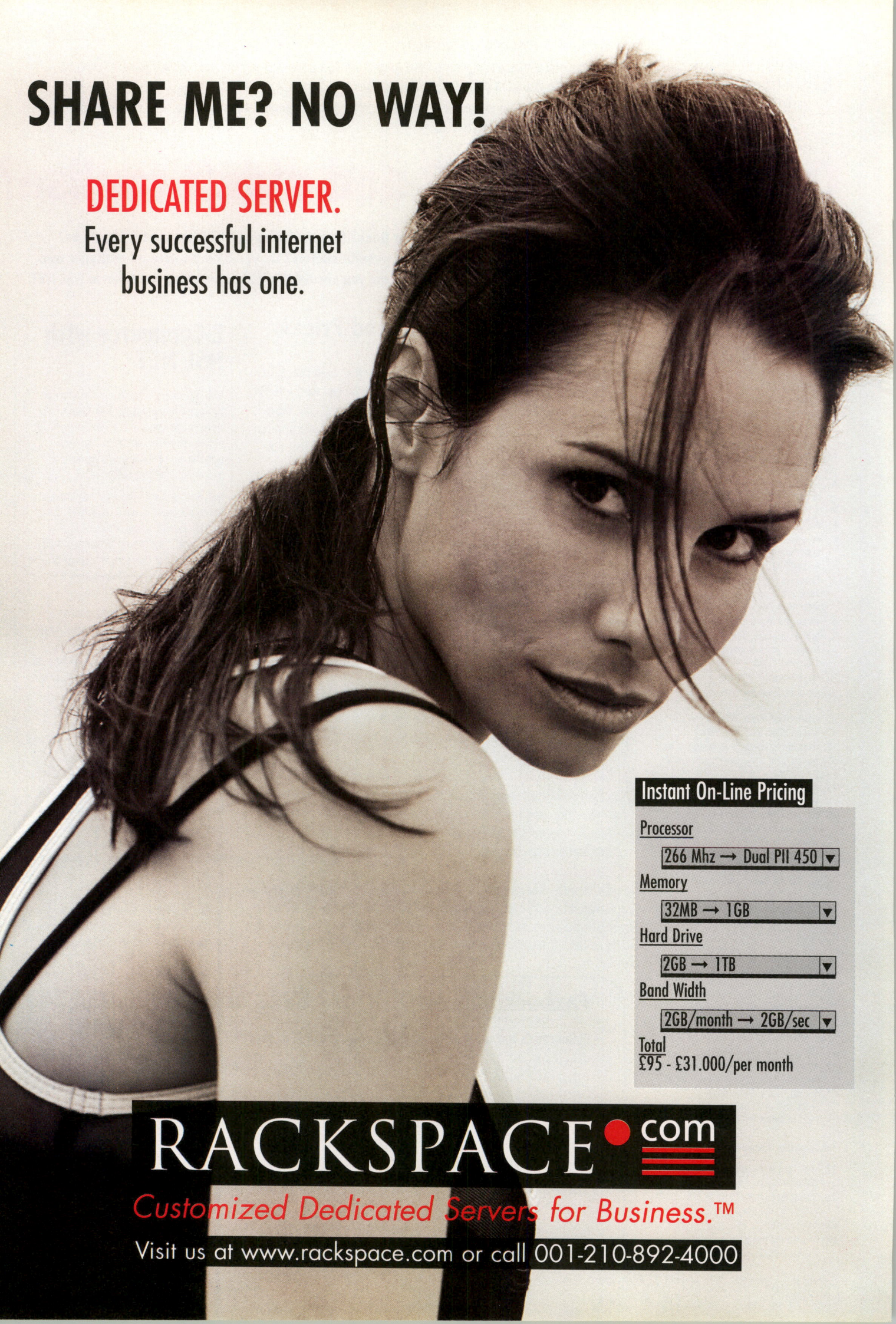
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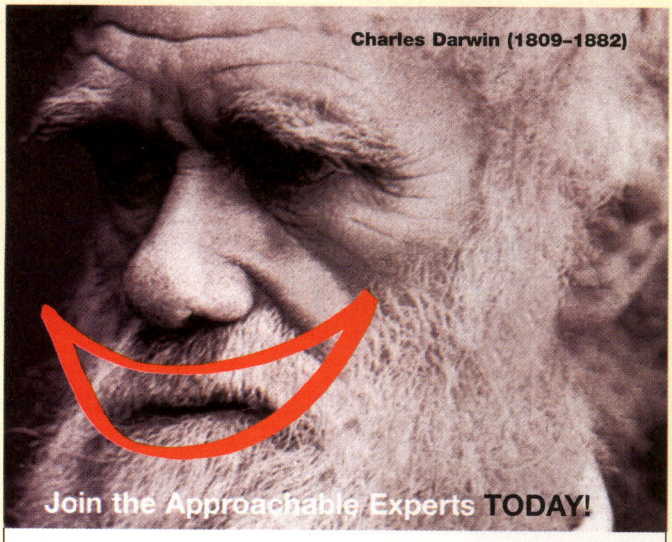

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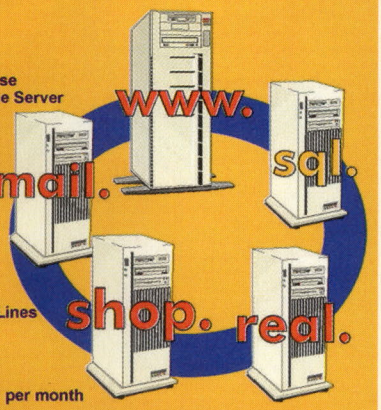

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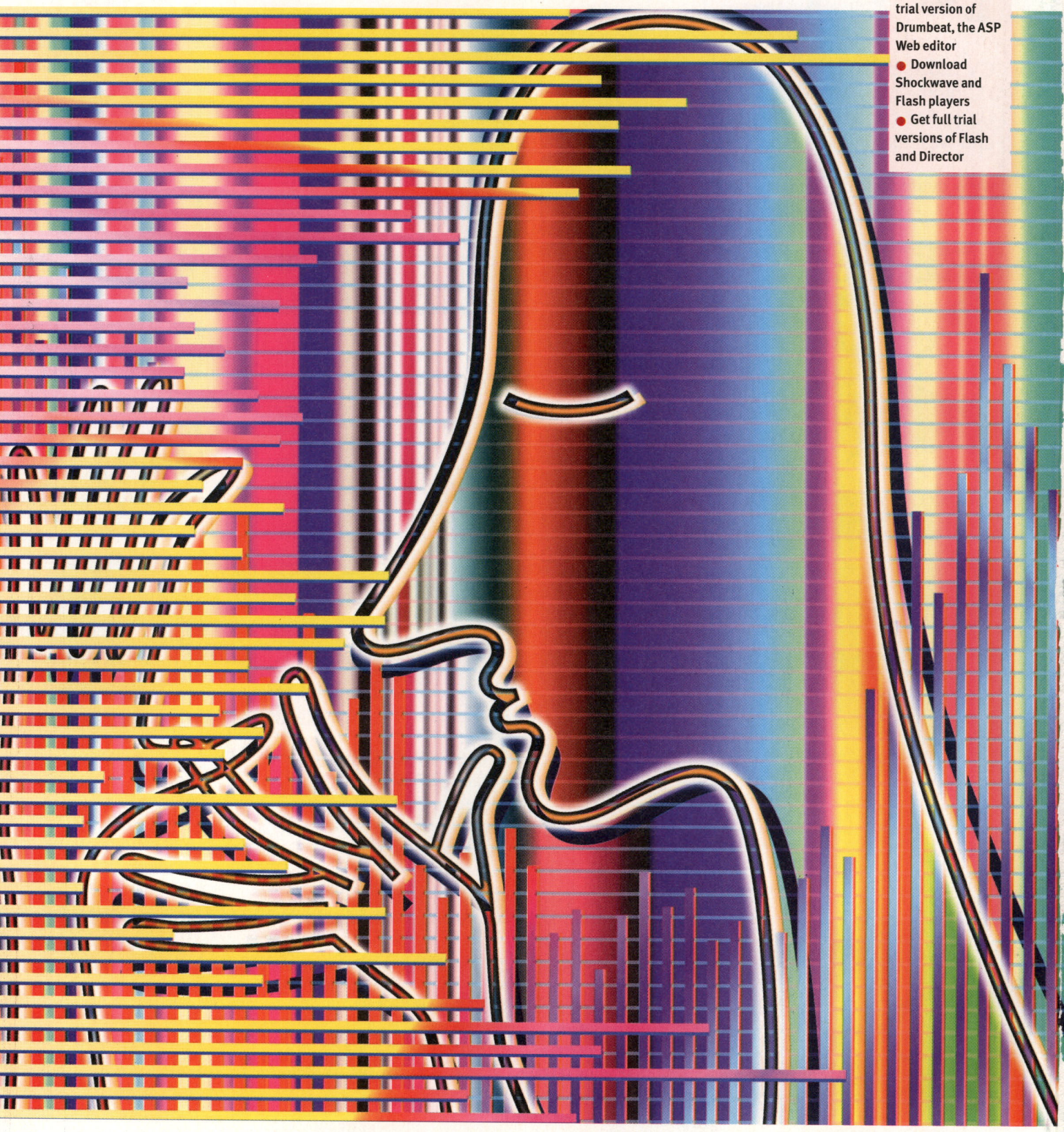

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